

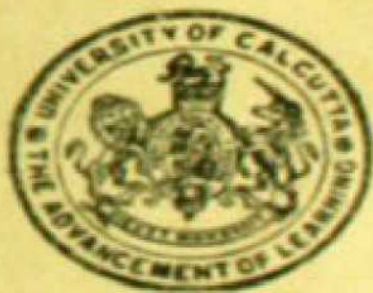
INDIAN WRITERS OF ENGLISH VERSE



# INDIAN WRITERS OF ENGLISH VERSE

BY  
LOTIKA BASU, B.LITT.

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TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
MY BELOVED FATHER



## PREFACE

INDIAN WRITERS OF ENGLISH VERSE by Lotika Bose is an arresting record of the first reaction of the Indian mind to the spirit of modern literature reaching us through the great English writers of the nineteenth century. The poems which follow in the first part of the book are a prelude to the Bengali literature of to-day and though they are not in themselves entitled to permanence, having been quickly replaced by the mother tongue, they possess considerable value as an evidence of the sensitive qualities of the Bengali mind.

I congratulate the authoress for the accurately interesting manner in which she has handled a comparatively obscure field of literature and presented it with a synthetic vision of its historical and literary significance.

*April 4, 1932*

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

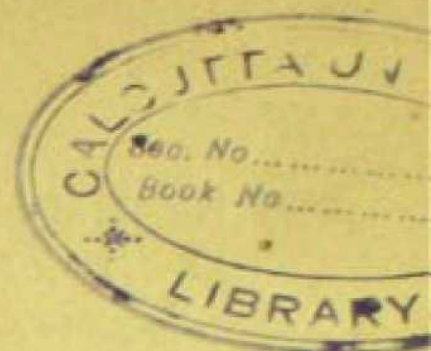


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## INTRODUCTION

A study of Indian Writers of English Verse must necessarily be imperfect because of the great difficulty of getting the material required. English verse is written extensively by Indians to-day, but it is usually imitative and conventional, and suffers from the fact that it is cheaply brought out by some small press in large cities, like Calcutta, Bombay or Madras, where it usually moulders, gets eaten by insects and is finally thrown away as waste paper. No notice of these books ever appears in the papers, nobody ever knows of their existence except a few friends, and so, unknown and unregarded, they perish. Yet, in spite of this, the study of the works that have been preserved, shows that, though few, there are writers of English verse, whose works add something to the richness of English literature, and whose merit justifies this study. Toru Dutt, Monmohan Ghose, Sarojini Naidu, and Aravindo Ghose have achieved considerable success in English verse. These rise far above the weak imitators of English poetry, and, by the strength and originality of their genius, form a school of poets joined together, not by any influence they have exerted on each other, but by their birth in the same place.

There are two chief reasons why Indians took to writing English verse. One of them is given



by Rabindranath Tagore in his foreword to Dr. T. O. D. Dunn's *Bengali Book of English Verse* :—

“ The following anthology has its greatest interest in being the self-recording evidence of the earliest response that Bengal gave to the touch of the West. I can safely assert that she is the only country in the Orient which has shown any distinct indication of being thrilled by the voice of Europe as it came through her literature. We are not concerned with a critical estimate of Bengal's literary adventures in the perilous field of a foreign tongue. But the important fact is, that, whilst there are eastern countries captivated by the sight of the immense power and prosperity which Europe presented to us, Bengal was stirred by the force of new ideas breaking in upon her from the western horizon .....

The shock which roused Bengal mainly came through literature and a great part of its energy followed the same channel of literature for its expression.”<sup>1</sup>

Here we get the first explanation. The writing of English verse was the first response which India gave to the touch of the West. We see that even before Macaulay's Minute, which led to the establishment of Western education, Kashiprosad Ghose

<sup>1</sup> *A Bengali Book of English Verse*, by T. O. D. Dunn, p. 1.



had published his book of English Verse—*The Shair and Other Poems*.

If we go deeper, however, and see why it was that English, a language totally foreign to Indians, without any traditions for them, was the medium of expression, we shall see that it was because there was no individual or school of poetry in the last quarter of the eighteenth century great enough to absorb the ideals brought in by the West and which could thereby enrich the vernacular literature. In Bengal we see Bharat Chandra and Ramprosad at the end of the eighteenth century, exhausting all the current themes. From the time of their death till the time of Madhusudan Dutt, who came heralding the renaissance of Bengali literature in 1860, we get no great poet or school of poetry. A school of poetry, therefore, naturally arose which imitated English ideas and ideals and even the language. At first it was purely imitative. Later, some of its poets like Madhusudan Dutt, using English ideas and ideals of poetry, naturalised them in Bengali verse and added a new and rich store to the poetry of their native tongue. On the other hand, poets like Manmohan Ghose, Toru Dutt, and others, added to the store of English poetry, not weakly imitating but singing with the sweetness and fluency of native genius.

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# INDIAN WRITERS OF ENGLISH VERSE

## CHAPTER I

### THE INTRODUCTION OF ENGLISH EDUCATION

In any work dealing with Indian writers of English verse, it is absolutely essential to give a short sketch of the beginnings of English education in India. Without this it will be impossible to understand the tremendous ferment caused, by the introduction of English education, not only in the life but in the literature of the people.

*The Establishment of the Calcutta Madrassah and the Sanskrit College in Benares and the Desire of Indians to learn English.*

The creation of the Supreme Court in 1774 in Calcutta led to important results. It created in Indians a desire to learn English whilst it convinced Warren Hastings that in order to have suitable Moulvies to help the judges in the administration of justice he must have an institution for their education. For this reason he established the Calcutta Madrassah, where, however, only Persian and Arabic were taught. In 1792 Jonathan Duncan,



the British Resident in Benares, established the Sanskrit College to revive Sanskrit learning. But the people themselves wished to learn English, for they saw it would be the only way to advancement. Education was in the most deplorable state. Except for the Calcutta Madrassah and the Sanskrit College of Benares there were no government institutions for the education of the people. One of the reasons for this neglect was the wish not to interfere with the religious and other institutions of the country. But it was not long before some noble-minded Englishmen, seeing the prevalence of ignorance and lack of educational institutions, urged "that a thorough education should be given to the different races inhabiting the country." A Committee was appointed to report on the state of education in Bengal. The report<sup>1</sup> shows a most shocking state of ignorance. For instance, in the district of Buckergunge in Bengal there was not a single school though it had a population of 926,723. The Tols<sup>2</sup> were only for Brahmins and taught grammar, theology and logic. Even the *Vedas*, *Vedantas* and *Gita* (religious books of the Hindus) were unknown to them. As a result of this investigation the Court of Directors under pressure of Parliament ordered "that a sum of a lakh (100,000) of rupees shall be set aside and

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Ramtanu Lahiri* translated by Sir Roper Lethbridge, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Schools where Sanskrit was taught to Brahmin boys.



applied to the revival and improvement of literature, for the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of the knowledge of the sciences in the British territories of India.”<sup>1</sup>

On the 17th of July, 1823, a Committee of Public Instruction was formed. A Sanskrit College was opened in Calcutta in 1824. In 1825 the Delhi College was opened to give instruction in Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. Though some classes in English were held the greater part of the Committee's energy was spent in encouraging the study of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. Large sums were spent in translating modern works into these languages and in printing original Sanskrit and Persian works. But the people were eager for English education and there was no demand for these books.<sup>2</sup> The question, therefore, was soon raised as to the usefulness of spending so much energy and money over the study of dead languages. Many members of the Committee advocated that Indians should be given a thorough education in the literature and sciences of the West.

In 1834 the work of the Committee was at a deadlock as half the members favoured the introduction of Western education and the other half wished to continue in the old groove. At last

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Ramtanu Lahiri*, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Macaulay's Minute quoted in *Recollections of Alexander Duff* by Lalbehari Dey, p. 55.



Macaulay as Law Member was appealed to, as to which side was right in its interpretation of the parliamentary decree. In his famous minute<sup>1</sup> which introduced a new era in India, Macaulay voted whole-heartedly with the Anglicists and Lord Bentinck issued the following resolution:—"His Lordship in Council is of opinion that the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and sciences amongst the natives of India and that all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education."<sup>2</sup>

The victory of the Anglicists was complete. Education was definitely established on Western lines. Government colleges arose in every important district in Bengal and other provinces in India as the English power spread. Taking everything into account it cannot be denied that this education has been beneficial to Indians. At the time it seemed an unmixed good, as can be seen by the fact that India's greatest sons defended it from attack.

### *Educational Activity in Bengal.*

We shall give an account of educational activity in Bengal in rather greater detail because it

<sup>1</sup> Macaulay's Minute quoted in *Recollections of Alexander Duff* by Lalbehari Dey, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Resolution, dated 7th March, 1835, and quoted in *Recollections of Alexander Duff* by Lalbehari Dey, p. 62.



was in Bengal that English education first started and it was there that it caused the greatest ferment. Besides, as will appear from our subsequent study, it was in Bengal that English verse was first written.

The beneficial effects of English education in Bengal was vastly helped by the splendid educationists who were there at the time. Besides prominent Bengalees like Rammohan Roy there were some Englishmen to whom Bengal owes a deep debt of gratitude. Prominent amongst these were :

(1) *The Serampore Missionaries : Carey, Marshman, and Ward.* In 1800 these men established schools at Serampore where Bengalees desirous of learning English flocked. Besides establishing these, Carey laboured in the cause of the Bengali language. He wrote a Bengali grammar and when Bengali had no prose literature worthy of the name it was at Serampore under the guidance of Carey that men like Vidyalkar, Mrityunjay, Ram Ram Bose, Hara Prosad Roy, Chandi Charan Munshi wrote prose works which were studied between 1800 and 1818.<sup>1</sup>

(2) *David Hare.* David Hare was a watchmaker in Calcutta who took a keen interest in education. With his name is associated the foundation of the Hindu College in 1817 (later the Presidency College, Calcutta). His aim in founding

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Ramtanu Lahiri* translated by Sir Roper Lethbridge, p. 57.



the college was "the tuition of Hindu children in the English and Indian languages and in the literature and science of Europe and Asia."<sup>1</sup> Though never a teacher himself he exerted a great influence on the student community. He knew all the students of the college personally and many are the stories told of his kindness to them. It is said that a sweetmeat-seller near his house had orders to supply the boys with anything they wanted.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary records describe the quaint figure of David Hare in a blue coat with large brass buttons moving through the class rooms and attending debates and academic meetings.<sup>3</sup>

(3) *Alexander Duff*, a Scottish missionary, was the founder of the General Assembly's Institution (now the Scottish Church College). He saw that the most pressing need was the removal of ignorance and superstition and that schools alone could do this. With the help of Rammohan Roy, Duff was enabled to start a small class at a building hired by Rammohan Roy for the purpose. The first day the pupils were only five in number, but because of the splendid abilities of Dr. Duff the school soon expanded to such proportions that a large building was hired for the purpose and

<sup>1</sup> From Stocqueler's *Handbook of India* quoted in *Presidency College Magazine*, January, 1917.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Ramtanu Lahiri* translated from the Bengali by Sir Roper Lethbridge, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> T. O. D. Dunn, *A Bengali Book of English Verse*, Introduction, p. 17.



masters engaged. Hundreds of boys flocked to the institute where they had a good education as well as a sound moral training. Lal Behari Dey in his '*Recollections of Alexander Duff*' has left a fine record of the educational work done by this eminent man.

### *Two Great Teachers.*

Besides these educationists there were two great teachers who not only inspired their students with a love of English literature but created an atmosphere of intellectual excitement and set a high standard of teaching. The first of these was H. L. de Rozio. *Henry Louis de Rozio* was only nineteen when he became a teacher of the Hindu College, but he exercised great influence over the minds of his students. Haramohan Chatterjee, a clerk of the college in de Rozio's time, gives us some idea of the latter's influence. "The students of the first, second and third classes had the advantage of attending a conversation held by Mr de Rozio where readings in poetry, literature and moral philosophy were carried on. The meetings were held almost daily before and after school hours though they were without the knowledge or sanction of the authorities. Yet Mr. de Rozio's disinterested zeal and devotion in teaching the students these subjects were characterised by a noble philanthropy. The students in return loved him most tenderly and were ever



ready to be guided by his counsels, and imitate them in their daily actions. In fact Mr. de Rozio gained such a great ascendancy over the minds of his pupils, that they would not move even in their private affairs without his advice. On the other hand he fostered their taste in literature, taught the evil effects of idolatry and superstition, and so reformed their moral feelings as to place them completely above the antiquated ideas and aspirations of the age. Such was the force of his instructions that the conduct of his students out of college was exemplary. It gained them the applause of the world from the literary and scientific point of view and also was of greater importance that they were considered men of truth. Indeed it is a general belief and saying amongst our countrymen, which those that remember the time must acknowledge, that such and such a boy is incapable of falsehood because he is a Hindu College boy.”<sup>1</sup>

Such a tribute paid to any teacher is indeed something to be proud of, but when paid to a lad of nineteen, it is marvellous. Again de Rozio gained all the influence he had in three short years for he died when only twenty-one. Besides being a good teacher de Rozio won a great deal of contemporary fame in India as a writer of English verse.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Life of Ramtanu Lahiri* translated by Sir Roper Lethbridge, p. 80.



*David Lester Richardson.*

This early tradition of an enthusiastic study of English literature was carried on sounder and more scientific lines by David Lester Richardson. Like de Rozio, Richardson was a poet and man of letters. He published miscellaneous literary works, but his chief merit lay, not in being a fine writer, but in being a clever scholar and a good lecturer. Macaulay wrote that one of the compensations of being in India was to hear Richardson read Shakespeare. Richardson fostered a love of English literature in his students and many of Bengal's greatest men were amongst them.<sup>1</sup>

*An Atmosphere of Great Intellectual Ferment.*

The steady inflow of Western culture by means of these great teachers had a very beneficial effect. An intellectual atmosphere was created which resembled in some ways the intellectual revival which took place during the Renaissance. As in the Middle Ages learning was in the hands of the clergy and schoolmen, so in Bengal before the nineteenth century the Brahmins exercised an intellectual tyranny which led to superstition and the cramping of men's minds. At the time we are speaking of men once more began freely to

<sup>1</sup> Madhusudan Dutt, Rajnarain Basu, Kesav Chandra Sen.



question the merits of existing institutions. We have already seen how under the leadership of de Rozio, students began to discuss with an open mind all social and moral questions. This was not the only association of its kind. There were many debating clubs where young Bengal held up the banner of freedom—freedom from superstition and formalism. They attacked with boldness the existing social and religious institutions of the country and declared war on the orthodox community which would have no change.<sup>1</sup> The discussions were carried on in their homes also. Orthodox parents were alarmed at this attitude of revolt and the wide circulation of these ideas. Many a young man was turned out of his home to save the family from what was considered disgrace. Such was the fate of many of Bengal's leaders. While under the influence of new ideas men like Rammohan Roy, Kesav Chandra Sen, Debendranath Tagore, Kali Charan Banerjee were working for social reform, Bengali literature was being enriched by men like Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, and later young Rabindranath Tagore. At the same time there arose men of less originality on whom English literature had a more direct influence, so that leaving their native tongue they adopted the English language as their vehicle of expression. Though

<sup>1</sup> For further account see chapter on Social Revolution in Bengal, in the *Life of Ramtanu Lahiri* translated by Sir Roper Lethbridge.



these first writers lacked the genius to use the English language as a vehicle for expressing themselves in literature, later there arose other writers who by their beautiful handling of English poetry justified themselves in using the English language.

What took place in Bengal after the introduction of English education repeated itself in the other provinces. We shall therefore content ourselves with a brief account of the development of English education in Madras and Bombay.

### *Education in Madras.*

The first impulse to education in Madras was given by a Government enquiry into the matter suggested by Sir Thomas Munro in 1822. As in Bengal, the report showed a great deficiency in educational facilities as well as the fact that the education given was not suitable for modern requirements, being more concerned with grammar and logic than any useful subject. In 1840 after the failure of two previous boards appointed by Lord Ellenborough's Government, a central school and a few provincial schools connected with it by scholarships were established. These schools encouraged the teaching of European literature and sciences. In 1841 the central school was converted into a high school. In 1853 a college department was added which later developed in the Presidency College, Madras. To-day numerous colleges have sprung up under the University of



Madras as well as high schools in every important district of that province. Educational activity is very keen in that province and the standard of examination far stiffer than in any other province in India.

### *Education in Bombay.*

The British conquest of the Deccan was followed by the establishment of many missionary schools and a system of Government schools in districts. In 1821 a Sanskrit College was established at Poona which grew into the existing Deccan College. In 1855 a board of education was established and an educational department was constituted. The Bombay University was established in 1857. It did very useful work and helped in spreading Western education throughout the province.

### *Some Account of Vernacular Poetry.*

A brief account of vernacular poetry, its aims and ideals, is necessary in order to see the accomplishment of Indians in the realm of their own poetry and in order to judge if they have lost or gained in writing in a foreign tongue. So different were the aims and ideals of English and Indian poetry that it was impossible for Indians brought up on Western traditions of poetry to be inspired to write in their native tongues. Besides, in Bengal



where English verse first began to be written, a period of deadness in literary activity synchronised with the introduction of English influence. There were no great poets in Bengal from whom the educated youth could draw his inspiration. It needed the thorough absorption of Western culture and men of genius like Madhusudan Dutt and Bankimchandra Chatterjee to use these new ideas to enrich the vernacular literature. A spirit of nationalism (also drawn from the West) quickened this renaissance which took place in all the vernacular literatures just as in Ireland the Modern School of Irish poets owes much to the Irish national movement. This movement in India was accompanied with a careful study of the older vernacular and Sanskrit poets.

As it will be impossible to give an account of the numerous vernacular literatures, we shall give an account of Bengali literature, the best developed of the vernacular literatures, as a typical example.

Bengali poetry may be roughly classified into (1) translations of Sanskrit poetry and (2) Folk Poetry. The former includes not only the translation of the Indian epics, the Mahabharata and Ramayana which were read or recited in almost every Hindu home, but also translation of the Puranic legends which were acted or semi-acted by professional minstrels who toured through the villages of Bengal. Under the latter category



(i.e., Folk Poetry), may be placed the great mass of miscellaneous narrative and semi-dramatic poetry as well as the songs of the Vaishnavas and other religious lyrics. Most of this poetry was either sung or acted in the villages or at the markets or fairs, and thus formed a very real part of the life of the people. The material was drawn from the Puranas or from later legends and stories which grew up in honour of various gods and goddesses or glorified certain princely houses. Professional singers called Mangalgayakas<sup>1</sup> gave performances by the roadside or in the villages, acting as they sang and now and then indulging in moral, theological or humorous digressions. Like the earlier bards or minstrels of the West they composed what they sang. A species of folk drama called *Yatras* also grew up. In these the old Puranic stories were dramatically represented. A cleared space in the centre formed the stage and the villagers sat round the actors. The performances were given by travelling bands of actors who went from fair to fair, or to seats of pilgrimages—wherever in fact there was a gathering of people and they were likely to get an audience.

*Bauls* or wandering singers also went about singing Vaishnava and other religious lyrics to

<sup>1</sup> For further account see Dineschandra Sen, *Literature of Bengal*, pp. 162-68.



the accompaniment of the popular one-stringed lyre (*Ektara*) thus gaining a precarious livelihood.

Though there was undoubtedly some very fine poetry (e.g., the narrative poems of Mukundaram, and the songs of Chandidas and Ramprasad) there was a tendency for the poetry to become mechanical and lifeless. It fell too much into one groove. Thus we had Vaishnava poetry falling into certain technical divisions which had to be adhered to:—the *Purvarag* or dawn of Love, the *Dautya*, or message of love, the *Abhisara* or secret going forth, the *Sambhoga Milana* or meeting of lovers, *Mathur* or final separation, and *Bhava Sammilan* or union of spirits.<sup>1</sup>

Such a classification takes away from the freshness of the lyrics and makes them stereotyped. The narrative and dramatic poetry show the same faults of conventionality and formalism. About 1800 the old themes were worked out. Both the Veda and Vedanta were forgotten and for centuries people were making verse out of two or three stories—Vidya Sundar, Siva Gauri and Radha Govinda. They could no longer recapture the naturalness and simplicity of Ramprasad and the artificiality of Bharat Chandra had become wearisome. Suddenly a whole world of new ideas and ideals was opened to them through the portals of English literature. Good teachers like de Rozio

<sup>1</sup> Dineshchandra Sen, *Literature of Bengal*, p. 123.



and Richardson gave life and soul to the study of the English literature. The enthusiasm of the exponents of this new culture knew no bounds. It revolutionized Bengali literature, nay it did more. In one bound it brought Bengali literature into the main current of world literature. Whereas Bengali literature was a provincial literature toying with a few themes which had lost all their freshness, hedged in with formal rules of technique, which led to mechanical and lifeless poetry, it suddenly became alive. It felt within itself the power to grow, to expand. Madhusudan Dutt utterly disregarding the existing convention brought in new methods of treatment. He chose his themes from the rich store of Sanskrit literature but he would no longer use the jingling couplets. Instead, he introduced blank verse into Bengali literature. In his technique it is Milton he follows, rather than any Indian models. Fresh channels of expression were sought and found. The novel, the drama proper (tragedy and comedy), the essay were all naturalised into Bengali. The old literature was studied with a new vision. Comparison with another literature awakened the critical sense. All this seems a great accomplishment, but the change went deeper. It affected the very language. From the laborious Sanskritized Bengali arose a new Bengali which taking the colloquial or spoken language for its basis was yet enriched and polished so that unencumbered with heavy



Sanskrit constructions it could express the thoughts and feelings of the people.

Enough has been said to show how deeply English literature had entered into the soul of the Indian people. The first sign of this was found in the writing of English verse by Indians. Gradually from this direct imitation we see Indians trying to work in the new ideals into the vernacular literatures. But English verse written by Indians under almost insuperable difficulties will always remain an evidence of the cultural conquest of England over India.

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## CHAPTER II

### EARLY WRITERS

#### *Kashiprosad Ghose*

✓ The first Indian to write English verse was Kashiprosad Ghose. He was born in 1809. He was a spoilt child and he did not attend school till the age of fourteen; but he soon distinguished himself especially by his mastery of the English language. While at college he wrote a review on the first four chapters of Mill's History of British India which was considered to be so good that it was published in the Government Gazette,<sup>1</sup> and was reprinted in the Asiatic Journal. In 1829, he left college. The same year he wrote "*The Vision—A Tale*," "*On Bengali Writers*," and "*On Bengali Works and Writers*."

These were published in the *Literary Review*, a Calcutta periodical. "*Sketches of Ranjit Singh*"

Poetry. and "*The King of Oudh*" were published in the *Calcutta Monthly Magazine*. Of his poetical tendencies he writes—"From my earliest boyhood I had a fancy to write poetry. The music of falling rain, the rustling of leaves attracted my attention

<sup>1</sup> Government Gazette of 14th February, 1829.



and in the abstraction of mind that followed I used to give vent to my feelings in verse. When I produced my first poem I showed it to Mr. R. Halifax now head-lecturer of the Hindu College, who observed that there was no measure in it, and advised me to read Carey's *Prosody*. But as a copy of the book could not be obtained in the shops I returned to Murray's *Prosody* and Lord Kame's *Elements of Criticism* from which I derived my knowledge of versification. I continued reading the best poets in a regular and measured tone which soon accustomed my ear to English rhythm. I re-wrote my first piece and showed it again to Mr. Halifax, who approved of it. I have since continued to write English Poetry. In the month of September, 1830, I published my *Shair and Other Poems*, which I now find ought not to have gone to the press. They not only abound in repetitions, but also a great many grammatical inaccuracies. I am now revising them." <sup>1</sup>

What the revised version would have been like we have no idea, for it never appeared. The first version is rather an immature attempt, as we see Kashiprosad himself felt. It did, however, make a very favourable impression which was voiced by several critics of the time. D. L. Richardson, a scholar and poet himself, wrote appreciatively in the *Literary Gazette*. After quoting one of the

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Gazette*, Nov. 1, 1834.





poems he concluded the appreciation as follows :—

“ Let some of those narrow-minded persons who are in the habit of looking down on the natives of India with arrogant and vulgar contempt read this little poem and ask themselves—could they write better verses not in a foreign tongue but their own.”<sup>1</sup>

Though we appreciate this gallant defence so characteristic of the generous-hearted Richardson we feel that Richardson was not judging Kashiprosad from the standpoint of the highest art but rather by the general standard of Anglo-Indian verse written in India at the time. Removed as we are from contemporary influences our judgment of Kashiprosad's verses will scarcely be a flattering one.

### *The Shair and Other Poems.*

The *Shair and Other Poems* consists of a long narrative poem entitled *The Shair* and of lyrics on various subjects. *The Shair* relates the story of a minstrel whose lady-love dies and who throws himself into the sea in grief, but Kashiprosad lengthens his poem by conventional descriptions of nature and tedious moralising in which English poetry of the 18th century and contemporary Bengali poetry abounded. The style, too,

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Gazette*, Nov. 1st, 1834.

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is ornate, full of conventional epithets, metaphors and similes usually from Bengali or Sanskrit poetry. For instance in describing the gloom of the Shair's mind he writes—

“ You may have seen the tender stem  
That bears the rose's blooming gem—  
How when the flow'et falls away,  
Snatched by a storm it doth decay !

“ You may have seen the lily flower  
That liveth in the watery bower—  
How smilingly and purely white  
It blooms when shines the moon at night.”<sup>1</sup>

And so the passage goes on. *The Hindu Festivals*<sup>2</sup> shows how out of sympathy Kashiprosad really was with Indian institutions for he misses the spiritual significance of these festivals and of the gods and goddesses they are named after. Instead they are paeans in praise of the deities and these latter are used to ornament his verse as the gods and goddesses of the Greeks ornamented the verse of the 18th century poets. His love poems lack originality and sincerity and are obviously poetical exercises. His poems of Nature are absolutely dull. He finds nothing more original than sunsets, clouds, and murmuring breezes to describe. His flowers are restricted to the rose and jessamine, varied now and then by the lotus,

<sup>1</sup> *The Shair and Other Poems*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 125-160.



while the only birds he is familiar with are the stereotyped Koil and Bulbul.

*Michael Madhusudan Dutt.*

Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the first great figure of the Bengali Renaissance, occupies but a secondary position as an Indian writer of English verse. After vain attempts to rank amongst the great English poets, he turned to his native tongue and in it accomplished that which made his name gratefully remembered as one of the great poets of Bengal. Michael Madhusudan's life was very interesting. Gifted, versatile and industrious, but wanting in steadiness, he was typical of the brilliant English-educated youth of the period. Madhusudan was born in 1824 in Jessore (a district of Bengal). He came of a respectable family with poetical traditions.<sup>1</sup> His father Rajnarain Dutt was a successful lawyer. At the age of thirteen Madhusudan entered the Hindu College. He soon distinguished himself by his command over English. Unlike Kashiprosad, Madhusudan had not to plod through books of prosody to write English verse, but verses naturally flowed from his pen. He wrote satires on and epistles to his school companions.<sup>2</sup> He was a

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Madhusudan Dutt* by Jogindranath Bose.

<sup>2</sup> Examples will be found in Jogindranath Bose's *Life of Madhusudan Dutt*, pp. 98, 99.



passionate admirer of Byron and sent poems to *Blackwood's Magazine* dedicating them to William Wordsworth. While still a young man he was suddenly converted to Christianity. This led to a quarrel with his father and Madhusudan went to Madras to earn his living. At Madras he married the daughter of an English Judge and wrote *The Captive Ladie*. On his father's death he returned to Calcutta. He found a set of young men who were trying to revive the Bengali drama. At this time the Bengali drama was still in a very crude state. As to how Madhusudan came to write Bengali verse his friend writes :—"Here it was that Madhusudan's mind was first roused to a sense of duty that he owed his country, and here it was that he first received inspiration to sing in his mother tongue. After attending the first rehearsal and before he had entered upon the task of translating the *Ratnavali*, Madhu said to me— 'What a pity the Rajas spent so much money on producing such a miserable play. I wish I had known it before for I could have given them a piece worthy of your theatre.' <sup>1</sup> Gour Mohan Das goes on to tell us how he chaffed Madhusudan about his idea of writing in Bengali; for our poet until then could hardly read or write Bengali correctly. What was his surprise when in the course of a week Madhusudan showed him the first few scenes of a Bengali

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Madhusudan Dutt* by Jogindranath Bose, p. 650



drama. His first drama *Sarmistha* was performed in 1859. Other plays and poems followed in quick succession. Madhusudan writes to a friend,<sup>1</sup> "Now that I have got the taste of blood I am at it again."<sup>2</sup>

In 1862 Madhusudan sailed for England to study for his bar examination. His wife and children followed. His affairs in India were mismanaged and he soon found himself in straitened circumstances. By the help of his friend the noble Vidyasagar,<sup>3</sup> Madhusudan was able to maintain himself and his family in England till he was called to the bar. He had bright dreams of prosperity on his return but when he actually returned in 1869 they were all shattered. His beloved wife died. He himself was taken ill and died in the Ailpur Free Hospital in Calcutta—a poor, friendless and broken man. Such was the tragic death of the first great herald of the new age in Bengali poetry.

Two longer pieces, *The Captive Ladie* and *Visions of the Past*, and some sonnets and lyrics form his only writings in English verse. *The Captive Ladie* deals with the story of Prithviraj, the most romantic figure in Rajput history. The story is well told and the poem shows Madhusudan's

<sup>1</sup> Raj Narain Basu, a social and religious reformer of 19th century Bengal.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Madhusudan Dutt* by Jogindranath Bose.

<sup>3</sup> One of Bengal's greatest reformers and educationists.



easy command over English metrical forms. He differed from Kashiprosad, inasmuch as he used the Romantic and not the 18th century poets as models. Unlike Kashiprosad his style too is free from moralising and conventional descriptions of Nature.

*The Captive Ladie* met with great success in Madras where it was first published. Madhusudan himself writes about it in a letter as follows—"I wrote it for the pages of a local paper, the editor of which, one of the most eminent men in India, has been blowing my trumpet like a jolly fellow. It has excited great attention here and many persons of superior judgment and acquirements have induced me to publish it in bookish form. So the printer's devils are at me."<sup>1</sup>

In Bengal however the work was not reviewed so favourably. *The Harakuru* rated the work of the Calcutta Dutts<sup>2</sup> far above his. Lord Bethune too was anything but encouraging and advised the young poet to turn his attention to verses in his native tongue.

*Visions of the Past* is a slight sketch in blank verse. It describes the Primeval Innocence, the Temptation of Man and his Fall in the form of visions. The blank verse is fairly good but there is nothing striking about the piece.

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Madhusudan Dutt* by Jogindranath Bose, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> The Contributors to the Dutt Family Album of whom we shall speak later.



Judging from Madhusudan's published works in English it seems a happy accident that deviated his muse to the field of Bengali poetry in which he attained real success. His English verses never rise above mediocrity. His imitations are good. The following description of Satan closely imitating Milton will show this :

“ A form of awe he was—and yet it seemed  
A sepulchre of beauty—faded, gone,  
Mouldering where memory fond mourner keeps  
Her lonesome vigils sad—to chronicle  
The Past—and tell its tale of coming years.  
Or like a giant tree in mighty war  
With storm on whirlwind car and fierce array  
Blasted and crushed—of all its pride bereft.  
Or like a barque which oft had walked the deep  
In queenlike majesty—and proudly brave—  
But by the fiery hand of some dread fiend  
Nursed in starless caves of ocean, shorn  
Of all its beauty in the boundless surge  
A phantom of departed splendour lone.” <sup>1</sup>

From this piece we see too that his command over metrical forms is far greater than his predecessor's, but he never rises to any heights of originality.

### *The Rambagan Dutt Family.*

The Dutts of Rambagan in Calcutta are a well-known Kayastha <sup>2</sup> family. Nilmoni Dutt was a

<sup>1</sup> *Visions of the Past.*

<sup>2</sup> The name of a caste in Bengal.



distinguished resident of Calcutta towards the end of the eighteenth century. His son Rasomoy Dutt also was very well known. Rasomoy had five sons, Kissen, Kailash, Govin, Hara (Hur) and Girish (Greece) Chunder Dutt. The last three together with their nephew Oomesh brought out a book of verses entitled *The Dutt Family Album*. While at college the brothers came under the influence of David Lester Richardson and acquired a considerable taste for literature. After their father's death the brothers as well as their cousin Sasi Chunder Dutt became Christians. A letter describing their conversion is given by Harihar Das in his *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*.<sup>1</sup>

*Govin Chunder Dutt*.—An interesting article on Govin Chunder Dutt was published by his second cousin Romesh Dutt in the *Calcutta Review*.<sup>2</sup> From it we learn that Govin Chunder was a devout Christian and a cultured, broad-minded and kind-hearted gentleman. We also learn that religious study and literary work were his sole occupations. He had two daughters, Aru and Toru, of whom we shall write later, and one son Abju, who died very young.

*Harachunder Dutt*—(Hurchunder)—was a regular contributor to the *Bengal Magazine*. He was the author of two works entitled *Writings*

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt* by Harihar Das, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Calcutta Review*, October, 1902.



*Spiritual and Moral and Heart Experiences or Thoughts of Each Day.* Besides his contribution to the *Dutt Family Album* he published a volume of verse called *Fugitive Pieces*. These were reprinted in a second volume entitled *Lotus Leaves*. Both volumes are now out of print.

Mr. T. O. D. Dunn says of them—"Both volumes are slight but they contain a pleasing variety of themes drawn from Indian history and the verse is graceful."<sup>1</sup>

*Girishchunder Dutt* (Greece Dutt).—From what we can gather he seems to have been a good scholar.<sup>2</sup> His niece Toru writes affectionately of him.<sup>3</sup> Girishchunder came to England and published a volume of verses entitled *Cherry Blossoms*, in 1887. The book contains sonnets and lyrics on various subjects. Many of his sonnets are on religious themes. Those describing Indian places show how out of sympathy he was with his themes. A great many of his lyrics describe English country scenes, but they are like the stiff and lifeless water colours of a well-meaning but totally untalented amateur. His historical ballads are bad imitations of Scott. His imitations of Wordsworth too are miserable failures. Instead of Wordsworth's profound reflections we get tedious moralising.

<sup>1</sup> T. O. Dunn, *A Bengali Book of English Verse*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Harihar Das, *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> A letter quoted in the *Life of Toru Dutt* by H. Das, p. 226.



*Oomeshchunder Dutt* was a very good French and German scholar. He wrote both original French and German verses and translated from these languages. The greater part of the poems of *The Album* is his composition.

### *The Dutt Family Album.*

This book was published by Longmans in 1876. The poems contain much facile versification. The verses on historical or romantic subjects are close imitations of Scott and Byron. Although the romantic poems seem the best in the book, they are imitative and superficial and treat the subjects from a Western point of view. The standpoint is that of Western chivalry and sometimes, except for a name here and there, the events might just as well have taken place in the Scottish borderland. A description by Girishchunder Dutt will show this—

“ For the roebuck still bounds by the dark haunted  
lake,  
And the partridge still springs from the deep tangled  
brake,  
And the perch and the salmon in silvery shoals  
gleam  
At morning and noontide in pool and in stream,  
And spite of the warders in highland in plain,  
Sarmasi can harry his father's domain.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Dutt Family Album*, p. 98.



The religious poems are sincere but never rise above the commonplace whilst the poems describing Indian scenes are commonplace and conventional. The *Album* is however typical of the earlier school. The verse is imitative and conventional whilst showing a certain command over the English language and its metrical forms.

### *Sasichunder Dutt*

Sasichunder Dutt was a cousin of the authors of the *Dutt Family Album*. He too was a convert to Christianity. In 1848, he published in Calcutta a volume of poems entitled *Miscellaneous Poems*. These were, however, reprinted in 1878 and published with other poems in a volume entitled *The Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems*. The poem called "*The Vision of Sumeru*" narrates the fall of the Hindu deities who are driven to hell by the power of Christ. The story is absurd, the verse structure uneven and clumsy, the rhyming faulty and the rhythm sing-song. Further, the gods are ridiculous and the angel melodramatic. On the whole it seems to us the poem is quite worthless.

The *Other Poems* consist of—

(1) Indian Ballads written in the style of Scott and Byron, with now and then an echo from Wordsworth. Like his kinsmen of the *Dutt*



*Family Album* he covers these ballads with only a thin Indian veneer.

(2) *Lays of Ancient Greece*, which are mere versified editions of the prose legends of Greece with which every schoolboy is familiar.

(3) *Miscellaneous Poems*, which end the book and give scope for the strain of moralising which is such a prominent characteristic of these early Dutts. Both the themes and the morals are entirely commonplace.

### *Romesh Chunder Dutt.*

Romesh Chunder Dutt was a member of the Rambagan Dutt family in Calcutta. He was born on the 13th August, 1848. Both his school and college career was brilliant. He came to England in 1868 in spite of great opposition and studied at the University College, London. He passed the Civil Service Examination with Distinction in Sanskrit and English. On his return he served in the Civil Service. But our main interest in him lies as a scholar and public worker. He did a great deal for the Indian peasant and had a large share in the passing of the Indian Tenancy Act of 1885. He served in the Decentralization Commission in 1907. In 1909 he gave much useful information to Lord Morley when the latter was projecting his Reforms.<sup>1</sup> After retiring from

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Romesh Chunder Dutt* by Natesan, p. 40.



the service of the Indian Government he served the Gaekwar of Baroda and helped to reorganise the whole administrative system of Baroda. In spite of his public work Romesh Dutt devoted much time to study and original research. He is still one of the best known authorities on Sanskrit literature. His *Civilization in Ancient India*, published in 1890, is even to-day the most comprehensive survey of the subject. Other interesting books written by Romesh Dutt in English are—*Three Years in Europe*, *The Literature of Bengal*, *The Peasantry of Bengal*, *Economic History of India*, *The Lake of Palms* (a novel), etc.

The books of Romesh Dutt which have reference to our subject are his *Lays of Ancient India*, published by Kegan Paul in 1894, and his compressed verse translations of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.

In the *Lays of Ancient India*, we have selections from Sanskrit poetry of various periods. The translation of the Upanishad stories seems to us the best in the book. On the whole the verses show scholarship and good taste but fail in giving a true idea of the beauty of Sanskrit poetry. It needed a poet as well as a scholar to have made them a success. The translations of the epics are more successful as a literary venture, for keeping as near as possible to the original metre Romesh Dutt has given a translation of the most interesting parts of the two epics.



Both the *Lays of Ancient India*, and the verse translations of the epics however are of greater interest to the scholar rather than the lover of poetry.

### *Berhamji M. Malabari.*

Berhamji M. Malabari was a Parsee. He was born in 1853 at Baroda. Orphaned at the early age of twelve he became a pupil-teacher, giving private tuition in

His Life. the evenings and going to the Irish Presbyterian Mission school in the daytime. During his school-days Malabari read widely both Guzerati and English literature. When he left school he became a teacher. In 1873 at the age of twenty he married. In 1876, Malabari left his school teaching and started a vernacular newspaper called the *Indian Spectator*. At first it passed through bad financial crises, but once fully established it became one of the best vernacular newspapers of the time. Through its columns, Malabari did much to educate public opinion on social matters, for Malabari was an ardent social reformer. In 1889 he went to England and started a vigorous campaign in order to enlist sympathy for the cause of Indian Womanhood. Malabari died in 1912.

Malabari wrote prose and verse both in Guzerati and English. Amongst his books of vernacular



poetry may be mentioned, *Niti Vinod*, highly praised by Dr. Wilson, the famous His Writings. orientalist.<sup>1</sup> He also undertook to translate Max Müller's Hibbert lectures into the vernacular. As far as his English works are concerned, *Guzerat for the Guzeratis*, written in a comic vein, satirising national failings, is the best known. His two other books in English prose are, *Indian Eye on English Life*, and *India in 1897*. Concerning his poetical works in English, except contributions to newspapers, *The Indian Muse in English Garb* is his sole published work. His English verses are rather poor poetical exercises in which he expresses his own political views and exposes some of the social evils of the time. At the time however it was quite a novelty for an Indian to write English verse so that he was hailed with surprise by such men as Tennyson and Max Müller.<sup>2</sup> Of his poems dealing with politics the most interesting seems to us to be *To a Disloyal Grumbler*.<sup>3</sup> *The Stages of a Hindu Female Life*,<sup>4</sup> and *Nature Triumphant over Caste*,<sup>5</sup> are typical of his poems dealing with social questions. Taking his poetical works as a whole *The Sketch*, which is an autobiographical account of Mr. Malabari himself till the age of twenty-one, would perhaps interest the reader the most. The

<sup>1</sup> Dayaram Gidumal, *Life of Malabari*, pp. 107-109.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>3</sup> *The Indian Muse in English Garb*, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> & <sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 25 and 35.



account of his teachers shows the wretched state of village education in India. We shall end with two short extracts describing the Parsee and Brahmin village-teacher respectively. First, the Parsee :

“ A man mysterious of the Magus tribe  
A close astrologer and a splendid scribe  
A faithful oracle of dead Hormazd’s will—  
A priest, a patriarch and a man of skill.  
A master weaver and to close details—  
He weaved long webs and Lord ! he weaved long  
tales !  
Hard murderous words that wisdom’s lips defied  
Would thick portentous from his nozzle glide  
And here we stuck though long and hard we tried—  
He cursed and caned, by turns we humm’d and  
cried.” <sup>1</sup>

Then the Brahmin Pundit under whom Malabari was next placed :

“ A seedy Brahmin with a visage stern  
Was lord despotic of this new concern,  
His speech though scant such as large peace  
portends,  
His hands and feet for that made full amends :  
For kicks and cuffs his favourite pastime form’d,  
Unlike his race he rain’d but never storm’d.” <sup>2</sup>

*T. Ramkrishna Pillai.*

T. Ramkrishna Pillai was a Hindu graduate of Madras and one of the earliest writers of English

<sup>1</sup> *The Indian Muse in English Garb*, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 85.



verse in Madras. He published a volume of poems entitled *Tales of Ind*, with Fisher Unwin in 1895. Previous to this, in 1891 he had published a volume of prose sketches entitled *Life in an Indian Village*.

The *Tales of Ind* are stories in verse on various Indian subjects. *Seeta and Rama* is a village idyll written in imitation of Longfellow's *Evangeline*. The longest tale in the book is *Chandra*. In this Mr. Pillai takes the historic battle of Tellikota round which he weaves a romance. The heroine is Chandra the daughter of Ram Raja of Bijayanagar.

The *Tales of Ind* are written in imitation of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, for Ramkrishna Pillai had met Tennyson and admired him immensely. The verse shows a creditable mastery of English prosody. The story is related with care and simplicity, except where he tries to embellish it by similes that are too long drawn out and retard the action of the verse. An example of this may be found in the simile with which *Chandra* begins.<sup>1</sup>

Besides this the poems are overloaded with conventional epithets—"deep shady groves," "peaceful homes,"<sup>2</sup> "the emerald greenness of the waving fields," and "pleasant cottage grounds," etc.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Tales of Ind*, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.



Ramkrishna Pillai's chief defect, as a writer of English verse, is his lack of originality and grip of life, so that one gets tired of the smooth patter of his verse.

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## CHAPTER III

### MINOR WRITERS

In the present chapter it is intended to give some account of the minor writers of English verse. The material has been chosen so as to make the chapter as representative as possible. All the provinces are given a place and the writers range from correct versifiers to a mass of writers who, having no knowledge of either English grammar or prosody, write verses in the hope of getting famous. These latter exemplify the saying "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." As far as possible we have tried to keep to chronological order, but the chapter is in no way exhaustive for this would entail monotonous and dull repetition. As a matter of fact this chapter is only interesting to the student eager to study the effect of English education. It is really a reflection of the ferment caused in the Indian mind by Western thoughts and standards, both in life and in culture. We shall see the deep still currents at work in the subsequent chapters.

#### *Navakissen Ghose (Ram Sharma).*

Navakissen Ghose, better known as Ram Sharma from his writings, was born on the 29th August, 1837. He was educated at the Oriental



Seminary in Calcutta and distinguished himself by his remarkable command over English. While at school he contributed to newspapers of the time, chiefly to the *Harkara* and the *Citizen*, writing both in prose and verse. After leaving school he studied law for a time, but finally entered Government service. At the age of nineteen he married. On the death of his first wife soon after the marriage, he married a second time. His official career is difficult to follow as he was shifted about from office to office. Suffice it to say he distinguished himself as an able worker and retired at the age of forty-one. The rest of his life (forty years) was devoted to literary and other works. All his literary work, both prose and verse, was in the form of contributions to newspapers and magazines, and the interested student will find his name occurring again and again in all the leading journals and periodicals of Calcutta at the time. On the death of Ram Sharma in 1918 his friend Devendrachunder Mallik collected and edited his poetical works in the form of a book. To him too we are indebted for the memoir of his life.<sup>1</sup>

As regards the poetical works of Ram Sharma undoubtedly he was a most voluminous writer, but we cannot agree with the high praise accorded by Mr. Mallik.<sup>2</sup> To us he seems a prolific

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *The Collected Poems of Ram Sharma*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 28-36.



versifier but scarcely a poet. The interest of his shorter pieces lies mainly in their contemporary character. *The Ode in Commemoration of the Visit of Prince Albert Edward in 1875*, though it gained him the first prize of rupees three hundred, seems to us nothing more than a clever poetical exercise. Ram Sharma being a very loyal subject the successive viceroys as well as the Royal Family roused his Muse to activity. He writes skits on contemporaries he disliked. *Lines to James Skribblerus* is a good example of his satirical verse :

“ Born in a garret on low rations fed,  
Exiled from home to find in Ind his bread,  
See Skribblerus comes from beyond the main  
With empty pockets and still emptier brain,  
Sustained by vanity and front of brass  
Though still a fool in wit, in sense an ass ;

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With fool's cap for helm and sword of lath  
The Grub Street hero apes Pelides' wrath,  
And dares like Phaeton drive Apollo's car,  
With sense, and taste, and virtue still at war.”<sup>1</sup>

Other poems are criticisms of contemporary events such as Lord Northbrook's vetoing of the Municipalities Bill.<sup>2</sup> His long poems like *Shivaratri*<sup>3</sup> and *Bhagvat-Gita*<sup>4</sup> are full of allusions to Indian

<sup>1</sup> *The Collected Poems of Ram Sharma*, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 244.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 260.



thought and legends. *The Swayamvar of Princess Lila*<sup>1</sup> shows that he can tell a story simply and connectedly, but his poems do not show any originality in style or treatment. On the whole, therefore, though Ram Sharma was a profuse writer of English verse, one can scarcely call him a poet.

### *Nizamut Jung.*

Nizamut Jung was born in Hyderabad on the 22nd April, 1871. He passed his Matriculation Examination at the Madras University at the age of thirteen. Later he came to England and took his Law Tripos at Cambridge. He was called to the bar in 1895. On his return to India he took service in the Hyderabad State and served there in various capacities. He is at present political minister at Hyderabad. His services in connection with the Great War obtained for him the titles of O.B.E. and C.I.E. from the British Government.<sup>2</sup>

Of a literary bent of mind he wrote English verses. Two small volumes of these verses were printed in 1914 for private circulation. His poems are concerned with the expression of personal feeling, and are therefore lyrical in nature. He shows special partiality to the sonnet form. His more recent verses have been published in an Indian newspaper, *The Comrade*.

<sup>1</sup> *The Collected Poems of Ram Sharma*, p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> For these facts of Nizamut Jung's life we are indebted to an article in the *Wednesday Review* of the 2nd July, 1924.



*Love's Withered Leaves* is a collection of sonnets giving expression to his love and forming a sequence.

From the sonnets it appears the poet could hope for no earthly union :—

“ Not here, not here, where weak convention mars  
Life's hopes and joys, love's beauty, truth and grace,  
Must I come near thee, greet thee face to face.” <sup>1</sup>

But this very barrier lifts their love to a spiritual plane—

“ Our union is above  
All earthly unions, ours those heights serene  
Where love alone is heaven and heaven is love.” <sup>2</sup>

It is his love which alone can lead him to God, and in it he finds his salvation. Nizamut Jung considers his love a holy passion in which neither selfishness nor earthliness can have a part :—

“ When I approach thee, love, I lay aside  
All that is mortal in me. With a heart  
Absolved and pure, and cleansed in every part  
Of every thought that I might wish to hide,  
From God I come.” <sup>3</sup>

In *Sonnets and Other Poems*, the sonnets are on various subjects but show a tendency to reflect

<sup>1</sup> *Love's Withered Wreath*, Sonnet X, lines 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Sonnet XIII, lines 9-11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, Sonnet VI, lines 1-5.



tion, such as the sonnet on *Death*<sup>1</sup> or on *The Mystery of Being*.<sup>2</sup> They also contain some natural description as shown in *On the Beach*, *Contemplation of Nature*, *Evening*, *Night*, etc.<sup>3</sup> *By the Sea Shore at Sunset* may be quoted to illustrate his natural description :—

“ A gleam of light sailed o’er the water’s breast  
From out the fading distance towards the shore  
Crowning with gold each swelling wave that bore  
This gloom of shadows deepening in the West.  
Now here, now there, from shivered crest to crest,  
It leaped, it flew—and then was seen no more.”

But Nizamut Jung is scarcely ever content with painting a picture. Nature is fraught with a mystic meaning for him. Dawn is but the joyous hymn to the great source of light, life and love. The significance of Night lies in the fact that it is the sacred time when the soul on unflagging wing seeks to soar back to her God. Again the dark waters over which the gleam of sunset flies from wave to wave, are but an emblem of the toil and gloom of life brightened for a moment by passion’s glow or the uncertain gleam of fleeting hopes.

The section entitled *Suspiria* contains love lyrics usually either in four- or eight-lined stanzas. Scattered amongst these are many songs which

<sup>1</sup> *Sonnets and Other Poems*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 16-29.



are reminiscent of the 16th and 17th century song writers. The following may be quoted as an illustration :—

“ Soft moonlight sleeps on hill and dale,  
Ah would she were with me !  
There’s fragrance in the sighing gale  
From wild flowers on the lea,  
And sadly sweet the nightingale,  
Pours love’s wild melody ;  
In vain ! Those charms bring no delight  
My soul asks Where is she.” <sup>1</sup>

Nizamut Jung’s Odes are written in close imitation of Gray. They are full of personification and are written in rather an artificial style. The *Ode on the Awakening of the East* is the best of them. In it he describes all civilizations as originating in the East and flowing to the West. The following is reminiscent of Arnold’s line <sup>1</sup>—

“ The East looked on, with heedless gaze  
Upon her youthful rival’s growing power  
And dreaming she looked on  
—and lost the precious hour.” <sup>2</sup>

On the whole Nizamut Jung writes far better than most of the minor writers. What is more, his versification is far more correct and he seems to have caught, to some extent, the spirit of the best masters, though his verses never rise above a

<sup>1</sup> *Sonnets and Other Poems*, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. Arnold, *Obermann*.



certain mediocrity which lacks individuality or originality.

*Roby Dutt (Ravindranath Dutt).*

Roby Dutt was the son of Jnanendranath Dutt of the Hatkhola Dutt family. He was born on the 1st of October, 1883. He was educated at the Metropolitan College, the General Assembly's Institution, and the Presidency College, and had a brilliant academic career specialising in languages. Very early he showed marvellous linguistic faculty as well as a talent for versification. At twelve he wrote poems in Bengali, Sanskrit and English. At nineteen he wrote Latin and French verses as well.<sup>1</sup> In 1904 Roby Dutt went to England and joined Christ's College, Cambridge, and Gray's Inn, London. In 1906, he passed the Medieval and Modern Languages Tripos in English and French. In 1909 he fell seriously ill, but recovered and returned to India in 1910. He became a lecturer in the Calcutta University in Comparative Philology and Mediaeval and Modern Languages. In 1913 he revisited England and married Emily Georgina Atkinson at Scarborough.

He returned to India, but his marriage proved a failure. Though he continued his work at the University, and his studies and original writings,

<sup>1</sup> Memoir of Roby Dutt's Life, at the end of *Stories in Blank Verse*.



his unhappy marriage weighed on his mind. Nervous depression and melancholia followed. In 1916, he was found drowned in a tank at his house in Baranagore, Calcutta. Most probably he committed suicide in a fit of depression.

Some of his original poems as well as *The Philosophy of Art* were published in Indian magazines while he was a student in India. Later, at the request of the Cambridge University Press through Arthur Symons, he translated *Sakuntala* in English verse, but it was not published till 1915. On reading the manuscript Arthur Symons wrote to Roby Dutt, "You are a real poet and have a wonderful command over the English language. Your *Sakuntala* is far superior to the two English versions (of Jones and Monier Williams). It will take rank among the best translations in English."<sup>1</sup>

In 1908, Roby Dutt completed his *Echoes from East and West*. It is a collection of renderings of epic, lyric, dramatic and didactic fragments from sixteen different languages (Sanskrit, Pali, Bengali, Zend, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, Provencal, French, Portuguese, German, Dutch, Icelandic, Freisic and Old and Middle English). It shows Roby Dutt's wonderful scholarship and linguistic abilities, but the book lacks order and sequence, and the translations from different

<sup>1</sup> Memoir of Roby Dutt's Life at the end of *Stories in Blank Verse*.



languages in different kinds of verse are presented pell-mell. Besides the translations are too short to give an adequate idea of the original. How can half a dozen stanzas from the *Divine Comedy* <sup>1</sup> or a dozen lines from the *Odyssey* <sup>2</sup> give an idea of those great works? The book may be described as metrical experiments in English from different languages. As far as possible Roby Dutt clings to the original metre, sometimes with disastrous effect as will be seen from his translation of Kalidasa's *Cloud Envoy*,<sup>3</sup> one of the most magnificent of Sanskrit lyrics. *The Slaughter of Meghnad* <sup>4</sup> from Madhusudan Dutt translated in Miltonic blank verse, and *The Jerusalem Delivered* <sup>5</sup> translated in the *Ottava Rima* are more successful. Whatever its defects the *Echoes from East and West* will remain as a monument of the linguistic powers and wide scholarship of Roby Dutt and as such will be of interest to the curious scholar. In 1915, Roby Dutt published two volumes of his early original poems. *Poems, Pictures and Songs* consist of lyrics. These are written in an artificial and stilted style :

“ Athwart the orchard, line on line,  
New lustre, life and vigour shine ;

<sup>1</sup> *Echoes from East and West*, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 224.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 189.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 96.



Mad Flora waking opes her eyes.

To greet young Zephyr in her dyes." <sup>1</sup>

From this style he drops at times into certain absurd inelegancies, as

"How sweet the rose

That aches the nose." <sup>2</sup>

The best poem in the book seems to be *The Skater*, a longer narrative poem. Roby Dutt is more successful in telling a story in verse than expressing thoughts or emotions in lyrical form. That is the reason perhaps why *Stories in Blank Verse* seems to be the most interesting of his three volumes of verse. The first poem entitled *The Heroic Maid* has Grace Darling for its subject. The rest are from Indian legends.

These stories are told in simple narrative style without any interruptions or high flights of fancy. The blank verse in which they are written follows Tennyson's *Idylls* rather than Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The author himself very rightly prefers *Mahasveta* and *Pundarik* the narratives of which are taken from *the Kadambari*. The book ends with an epic fragment, *The Ceyloniad*, written in the Miltonic style. This story is originally told in the *Mahavamsa*. The poet intended it to be the national epic of Bengal in twelve books, but he only succeeded in writing 180 lines.

<sup>1</sup> *Poems, Pictures and Songs*, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.



From the above it will appear that Roby Dutt, though a fine scholar with a command over the English language and its metrical systems, lacked the vigour and imagination of a true poet.

### *Manikram Vasanmal Thadani*

Manikram Vasanmal Thadani is a Punjabi by birth. He has published two volumes of verse, *The Triumph of Delhi and Other Poems*, and *Krishna's Flute*. Each book contains two longer narrative poems and some shorter lyrics.

*The Triumph of Delhi* recounts the ancient glory of India. It recalls a Golden Age which Indians of to-day love to idealise. He waxes particularly eloquent over the sages and the forest schools of Ancient India. Although in the Spenserian stanza, it is written in the conventional 18th century diction. Such passages as the following are full of personification and illustrate the artificiality of diction :—

“ And red-eyed Lust, Ambition's restless pace,  
The biting glance of sneaking Jealousy,  
And gnawing Hatred, Anger's fiery face,  
And blood-born Murder and its grim ally,  
Revenge with iron heart and stony eye  
Unseen in ancient India were unknown.”<sup>1</sup>

The next poem *Rajarshi* is written in the same metre and style. Whether *Rajarshi* is Janaka,

<sup>1</sup> *Triumph of Delhi and Other Poems*, p. 9.



or Vishwamitra who is so called or some other kingly sage, is not mentioned, nor is the text helpful in this respect. The poem entitled *Krishna's Flute* in the book of the same name, is interesting because it gives in a condensed verse-form the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita. Thus we have

“ Behold the Universal self in thee,  
And all things in the Universal self,  
And in the living light of wisdom see  
The parts united in the parent whole.”<sup>1</sup>

Or again,

“ Perform thy duty with a heart entire  
And firm in union with the law divine,  
Renounce the fruit, the deed and the desire,  
Success or failure is for ever mine.”

Or,

“ Immortal is the soul, it cannot die  
But wears when they are old its garments new.”<sup>2</sup>

*Sati*, the second poem in *Krishna's Flute*, is written in blank verse and tells a Rajput tale. It dates back to the first conquests of the Moham-medans, and describes the self-immolation of a beautiful Rajput princess on the pyre of her husband.

<sup>1</sup> *Krishna's Flute*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.



The lyrics that end the two volumes are not at all inspiring. Sometimes the writer uses them to express his philosophy of life as in the *Bird of Life*, but they do not seem to come spontaneously from the writer's mind, but are obviously written for the sake of effect.

A poem entitled *Radha-Krishna* of some thirty-four stanzas, from the pen of the same author, appeared in 'From Overseas,' an anthology of dominion and colonial verse. In this poem Thadani seems to make more effective use of the Spenserian stanza, for he seems to have caught some of the music of the original. It describes the Longing of Radha. This subject has been exhaustively dealt with by the Vaishnava poets. Radha's love for Krishna is explained in Vaishnava philosophy as the love of the human soul for God. Like so many Vaishnava lyrics Thadani's poem may be taken metaphorically though written in terms of human love.

Though Thadani's verses are quite readable yet one can scarcely class him as anything more than an able versifier.

*P. Seshadri.*

P. Seshadri of Madras, who is at present Professor of English Literature in the Benares University, has published three slender volumes of sonnets. He uses both the Italian and Shakes-



pearian forms though perhaps he is more partial to the Italian form. The first volume entitled *Sonnets* appeared in 1914, and was printed in Madras. The first few sonnets, entitled *Love's Garland*, are love sonnets and describe various incidents when he was with his loved one, as *At the Beach*, *At the Ruins*, *An Evening in the Lagoon*, etc. The rest of the book consists of sonnets on miscellaneous subjects, mostly in commemoration of certain people such as Toru Dutt, Romesh Dutt, Milton, Tolstoy.

*Champak Leaves* consists of sonnets on different subjects interspersed with sonnets on love. Some of them have their theme in romantic incidents from Rajput history or other legendary incidents. Two poems entitled *A Sister's Wail*, refer to the evils of the indentured labour in the Fiji Islands, and the sufferings of the women workers. *Vanished Hours*, his last volume of sonnets published in 1925, was dedicated to the memory of his wife and commemorates their love. On the whole Mr. Seshadri's sonnets are little more than literary exercises.

### *Ben F. Powell.*

Ben F. Powell comes from the district of Ganjam. He brought out a volume of verse in 1917 entitled *True yet Stubborn Facts*. The book is a collection of practical axioms, which Mr.



Powell learnt in childhood from his father. As they served him in good stead he thinks it his duty to expound them and chooses the verse form as being more original. He further explains that he started writing verse when he was fifty. That maturity in age does not mean maturity in verse is evident, as only the inverted constructions, the rhymes (often very bad ones) and the measured lines remind one that one is reading what is intended to be verse. The axioms taught are on *Early Rising*,<sup>1</sup> *Ill Company*,<sup>2</sup> *Regularity in Diet*,<sup>3</sup> *Punctuality*,<sup>4</sup> *Malaria and the Mosquito*,<sup>5</sup> etc. It is evident by rushing into the sacred realm of poesy Mr. Powell has done nothing to increase the popularity of these well known yet often transgressed maxims.

### *Rustom B. Paymaster.*

Rustom B. Paymaster is the author of several volumes of English verse. These are *Sunset and Sunrise*, *Midnight and Dawn*, *The Voice of the East on the Great War* (1st series), *Navroziana or Dawn of a New Era*, and *The Voice of the East on the Great War* (2nd series). The two series

<sup>1</sup> *True yet Stubborn Facts*, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 150.



of the *Voice of the East on the Great War* celebrate various incidents during the Great War. Mr. Paymaster never fatigues in justifying the Allies' cause, hurling abuse on the Germans, versifying speeches and pronouncements made about the War, specially about India in connection with it, e.g., Mr. Lloyd George's speech at Bangor in February 1915,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Asquith's speech in May 1915 at the Guildhall,<sup>2</sup> Mr. Bonar Law's speech at the imperial patriotic meeting,<sup>3</sup> etc. He also appeals eloquently for various funds in connection with the Great War, and prays for the success of the Allies. But though we admit that his efforts were most laudable at the time, we fail to see why he should do all this in verse. It is scarcely inspiring to read such verse as

" O by your work of true beneficence  
Lift up the starving injured innocents,  
By patient constant dribblets you can make  
A reservoir full or even a lake,  
From annas, rupees, rupees sovereigns,  
You soon can make if you will but take pains.  
So by your mission of sweet mercy. pray,  
Make July tenth a memorable day." <sup>4</sup>

*Navroziana* contains verses in praise of eminent Indians like Gokhale, Dadabhai Naoroji, Sir

<sup>1</sup> *The Voice of the East on the Great War*, 1st series, pp. 34 and 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* (second series).



Pherozsha Mehta, Mr. Telang and others, as well as of Lord Hardinge and Dr. William Wordsworth, a much beloved principal of Elphinstone College. The verses of Mr. Paymaster are like advertisement jingles of the most depressing kind.

### *Pithawalla.*

Pithawalla is a Parsee by birth. He published three volumes of poetry. *Mornings with Zoroaster*, *Afternoons with Ahura Mazda* and *Sacred Sparks*. The verses are in glorification of the Parsee religion and customs. Neither the versification nor the matter is of the least interest to the non-Parsee reader.

### *Adeshar Manecji Modi.*

Adeshar Manecji Modi is a Parsee who published *Spring Blossoms*, a small volume of verses in 1919. The verses are written in simple metres and have a religious and moral note in them. Thus in *Taj Mahal* he says :—

“ Then learn that naught is constant here below  
And life and fame are but a passing show  
Strength, youth and beauty, and all that men desire  
Wealth, honours, thrones, all melt like wax in fire.”

*O Man Forbear to Slay* gives a touching picture of animals led to the slaughter-house and appeals for the sacredness of animal life. *Pathway to Happiness* tells us that only through virtue



can happiness be gained. There is scarcely a poem which does not moralise. In spite of the introduction of Dr. Sisson, we might safely say that the moralising is of the most commonplace kind and that the literary value of the book is nil.

*Govinda Krishna Cheltur.*

Govinda Krishna Cheltur published a small volume of verses with Erskine Macdonald called *Sounds and Images* in 1921. The author is from Madras and came to Oxford to finish his education. In his verses he tries to imitate the style of Yeats to whom this book is dedicated. His poems however lack depth. The book consists of lyrics and sonnets. It strikes us that the author has nothing worth saying and dallies with idle fancies and imaginative phrases which lead nowhere.<sup>1</sup> His simpler poems such as *To I—M— (aged 8)*, *Death of a Child*, etc., are better, but there is nothing striking about them. We shall end by quoting one of these to give some idea of his verses :—

“ We are all of us Poets though we know it not,  
 And only some can write,  
 The world makes us hard, and the things we sought  
 Have passed away from sight :  
 The dreams we once dreamed are all forgot,  
 And gone our vision's light :

<sup>1</sup> *Sounds and Images*, p. 26.



But still we may see in a moment's gleam  
 Passion in sunset skies :  
 Still we may joy in an idle dream,  
 Grieve when a flower dies  
 And still we may feel though our thoughts but seem  
 All strange and otherwise." <sup>1</sup>

### *Pamphlets in Verse.*

The Pamphlets treat of a wide variety in subject but these can scarcely be called poetical in their choice or treatment. They are either wretched doggerel, bombast, or a mere jingle of words and rhymes. They are often full of grammatical errors and written in the worst possible English. They may be classified as — (1) Social, (2) Satirical, (3) Patriotic, (4) Ethical, and (5) Narrative.

#### (1) SOCIAL.

These pamphlets are written for social reform, but why the authors have written in English instead of the vernacular is an enigma. Evidently they adopted the English language as they thought it more dignified and distinguished, but their Muse shows more zeal in social reform than in observing the laws of prosody or originality in treatment. For instance, *Dowry and Destiny*, a story written in verse by F. B. Mylvaganam and published in

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 43.



Colombo in 1910, attacks the dowry system. The style is bombastic. *Snehalata* by Ramaswami Sastri is another narrative written for the same purpose. It was printed in 1915 and commemorates the noble but tragic death of Snehalata, a Bengali girl who committed suicide to save her father from being ruined in order to endow her marriage. One feels however that the author has failed to make the best of a good subject. *Mani and Ratna* by Virabhadra Rao is written in dramatic form and is described by the author as a Hindu drama in English. Its purpose is to show the defect of the present marriage system in India. It is a strange mixture, being a poor imitation, more in the nature of a serious parody of Kalidasa, Shakespeare and modern vernacular farces. The first scene is an imitation of the scene in Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* where Sakuntala is watering the plants with her maidens and Dushmanta appears. Act II, Scene I, and Act III, Scene II, are very much like scenes in popular vernacular farces. The idea of Mani disguising herself as a boy and Kuntala falling in love with her as well as the situation arising from it is imitated from Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup> A pure plagiarism is seen in Act IV, Scene III, when we get a repetition of the scene between Lorenzo and Jessica

<sup>1</sup> *As You Like It*, Rosalind and Phoebe episode. *Twelfth Night*, Viola and Olivia episode.



as they are waiting in the garden for Portia's arrival :—

*Ratna*

In such a night  
Nala the good unseen by sentinels  
Entered sweet Damayanti's castle room  
As bearer of love news.

*Mani*

In such a night  
Sakuntala, un-noticed by her maids,  
Came out from Kanwa's hermitage and met  
Dushanta 'neath a shade .....

*A Plea for Education*, by J. Mangiah, printed in 1912, tries to set forth why the people of India should be educated. It is a patter of doggerel of the worst kind :

“ Industry, Commerce and Economics  
Are natural steps to histories  
Of our earth's patron's health  
And of their substance wealth.”

## (2) SATIRICAL.

These are in the nature of skits on social and political organisations and are more vulgar than clever. *Song of the English Commercial and Industrial Bee* and *The Song of the Home Ruler and anti-Home Ruler* are both written by Srihari Nayudu and were published in Madras in 1917. They are rather coarse skits on the Home



Rule Campaign of Mrs. Besant as well as the Swadeshi movement and have no literary merit.

*Snapshots* by S. C. Mukerjee (popularly known as Funniman who is a professional comic entertainer at private functions in Calcutta) consists of skits on the Calcutta Municipality, parodies of a few passages from Shakespeare, etc., and is more in the nature of mere buffoonery than poetry or satire.

### (3) PATRIOTIC.

These pamphlets are chiefly patriotic effusions in the cause of the Empire and the Allies elicited by the Great War. They are either mere poetical exercises or wretched doggerel.

*Ye Sons of England*, written in imitation of *Ye Mariners of England*, is a piece of patriotism prompted by the War. *Ind on the End of the War* and *Ind on Famine* are by D. A. Naik. The first celebrates the armistice and consists of vituperations against the Germans and the second is an appeal for funds to relieve famine in India. *A Ballad of Coronation* by C. S. Narshima Row, printed in 1911 in Coconada, is a piece of doggerel celebrating the Coronation of George V.

*Some of my Poems presented to distinguished Persons* is a collection of acrostics and poems to Viceroys of India, Provincial Governors and various Maharajas. Even as poetical exercises these are thoroughly bad as can be seen by



the rhyming of such words as 'forward' with 'afford,' 'crime' with 'regime.'

#### (4) ETHICAL.

These have a religious or ethical motive and most of them can be called verse only by courtesy. *English Poems* written by Kaji Mahabeer Singh are one hundred and twelve sentences which the author claims to be proverbs, but why he calls them poems one can scarcely understand. *Heaven*, by Narendranath De, too, consists of verses which are dull to the extreme though the author claims that they were written in moments of spiritual awakening. In *New Mazdin*, by A. K. Amal, printed in Lahore in 1921, the writer wishes to expound a new religion but the whole is a curious mixture of Biblical stories like Noah's Ark and the fall of Adam and Eve, to which a new interpretation is given. Buddha appears as Christ and Moses as Mohamet. The pamphlet is an absurd piece of poor versifying. *Hope*, by Hossain Kidwai, published by Luzac and Co. in 1923, is a paean in praise of Hope. It is both artificial and lifeless.

#### (5) NARRATIVE.

These are really stories in verse and range from the metrically correct to the most ridiculous presentations. *Kusumlata* has for its theme a



story, which is usually told by Indian Grandmothers, of a king and seven queens of whom only one has a child. The others through jealousy try to kill it but the child is saved, grows up ignorant of her identity and finally marries a prince. *Beware*, by S. Kambhotlu, a pleader at Lahore, is also taken from a popular story of how a sage being indebted to a Pariah for a pair of boots is born again as his son.

*Sakuntala*, by Vasudeva Rao, is a verse-rendering in narrative form of the story of Sakuntala and closely follows the drama by Kalidasa, but the poem is really a commonplace patter of verse.

*An Indian Tale*, by N. C. Rai, attempts to give a picture of Indian village life but the obscure style and confused story interspersed with dreary moralising is so tiresome that the piece is unreadable.

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## CHAPTER IV

### SELECTED WRITERS

#### *Toru Dutt.*

Toru Dutt was born on the 4th March, 1856. She was the youngest of three children of Govin Chunder Dutt. Toru was an imaginative and intelligent child. She learnt her letters fast and would listen with avidity to the old Hindu myths told by her mother. A little later her education was conducted by a certain Shibcharan Bannerjee. Toru in her recollections<sup>1</sup> of those days tells us that they used to read Milton's *Paradise Lost* with him. In 1863, Govin Chunder took his children to Bombay for a visit. In 1865 Toru's only brother Abju died and Govin Chunder was left with his two daughters Aru and Toru. In 1869 the whole family sailed for England. They stayed for some time at Nice where the two children went to a French *Pensionnat*, the only school they ever attended. From there they went to Paris and after a short stay went to England. Short though Toru's stay was in France, French became her favourite language and her love of France could scarcely have been greater had Toru been a Frenchwoman. In the spring of 1870

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, by Harihar Das, p. 18.



they settled in London and there met many interesting people. Toru and her sister learnt singing, music and French. They also read the English classics with their father.

Toru took a great interest in European politics, specially in the Franco-Prussian War as evidenced by the following extract from her diary :—

“How things have changed in France since the last time I took this diary in hand. During the few days we stayed in Paris how beautiful it was! What houses! What streets! What a magnificent army! But how fallen it is. It was the first amongst cities and now what misery it contains. When the war began my whole heart was with the French, though I felt sure of their defeat. One evening when the war was still going on and the French had suffered many reverses, I heard papa mention something about the emperor to mamma. I descended like lightning and heard that the French had capitulated at Sedan. I remember perfectly how I ascended the stairs and told the news to Aru half choked with tears.”<sup>1</sup>

The Dutts went to Cambridge in 1871.\* Here the sisters attended the higher lectures for women. Miss Arabella Shore<sup>2</sup> who saw them there was struck by their excellent English and their know-

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, by Harihar Das, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> The author of *Fra Dulcino* and other poems and editor of the *Journal of Emily Shore*.



ledge of European life and thought. In 1873 the Dutts returned to Calcutta. We get a vivid picture of the next four years of Toru's life from her letters to Miss Martin.<sup>1</sup> During these years Toru spent her time between their garden house at Baugmaree and their town house in Calcutta. She scarcely ever left her home except to go for drives, but her life is full of tranquil happiness marred only by the shock of her sister's death and her own lingering illness. Her father was a perfect companion and friend to her. They were both occupied in the same studies and read the same books. Toru's life was spent in quiet study and reflection and simple domestic enjoyments. Her loving, joyous nature clung affectionately to all around her, and filled the house with sunshine. She was passionately devoted to animals and birds, both wild and tame. The Baugmaree garden with its trees, groves, flowers and pond full of fish is a constant source of joy to her. Her letters are so full of these pets that we become as familiar with them as Toru herself. We see Baguette the pretty, frisky kitten playing about her mistress and almost upsetting the ink-pot, or Gentille and Jeunette, the horses, running races with their young mistress along the garden avenues.

<sup>1</sup> The daughter of a clergyman in Cambridge with whom Toru formed a deep friendship.



Her descriptions of the birds in the garden show what a close observer of Nature she was.

“The mornings are so pleasant in the garden. Very early at about three in the mornings the Bhimraj, a little bird, begins its songs. Half an hour afterwards all the bushes and trees burst into melody, the *Kokilla* and *Bowkathakow* which means ‘Speak, O Bride.’ The gay little humming birds with their brilliant colours dive into flowers for honey with busy twitters. From noon till four it is quite still, except for some lone woodpecker in some far-off tree. Then in the evenings, all the birds are astir again till it gets dark when like the wise little creatures that they are, they go to bed.”<sup>1</sup>

Although Toru scarcely went out of her home she was a keen watcher of the social and political life of the day. Her letters are full of descriptions of passing events.<sup>2</sup> We also get a good idea of Toru’s studious habits and wide range of reading from these letters. On her return to India she set about learning Sanskrit and continued in spite of ill health. She also read with avidity books of all kinds—mostly French. There is frequent reference to the pages of *Revue de Deux Mondes*, which she praises very highly as a good magazine. She also mentions lists of French books which they sent for from Europe, giving pungent,

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt* by Harihar Das, p. 86.

*Ibid*, pp. 136, 139, 143, 190, etc., etc.



criticisms of many of them. We get, too, very concise criticisms of the English books she reads, and she often recommends them to her friend.<sup>1</sup>

At times the poet peeps out in her letters and we get a lovely vignette like the following :—

“ The night was clear, the moon resplendent, one or two stars glimmering here and there. Before us stretched a high avenue bordered with casuarinas, very like the poplars in England. Dim in the distance the gateway; around us the thick mango groves, the tall betel-nut trees, ‘ straight like an arrow shot from heaven,’ the cocoanut palms with their tall, waving plumes of green foliage, and all wrapped in a sweet calm.”<sup>2</sup>

In spite of all her cheerfulness a note of tragedy runs for us through her letters, knowing as we do, how soon the young life was to end. Amidst the life and vivacity she displays, there comes from time to time a touching brief paragraph in which she tells of her illness. Usually it is only a short notice, such as the following :—

“ I could not write to you last week, as I had one of my bad fits of blood-spitting.”<sup>3</sup>

But we see these sentences more frequently as her letters go on. In her last letters it is ennobling

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, by Harihar Das, pp. 208, 215-218, 234, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, by Harihar Das, quoted in the Introduction by H. L. Fisher.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 258.



to see her unconquerable spirit struggling against pain and weakness and refusing to be daunted.

On the 13th August, 1877, Govinchunder Dutt writes to Miss Martin about Toru, and she can only add in a weak trembling hand "My own darling Mary, accept my fondest love—Toru Dutt."<sup>1</sup> The end came suddenly on the 30th August. At the age of twenty-one years this eager, passionate and beautiful spirit passed from this world and to-day we can only recapture it from the three small volumes which contain the whole output of Toru's works in prose and in verse, and from her wonderful letters, so full of life and interest. In her own words, while translating a French poem, we might say—

" Thus dies and leaves behind no trace  
A bird-song in the leafy wood ;  
Thus melts a sweet smile on a face." <sup>2</sup>

### *A Sheaf gleaned in French Fields.*

Toru Dutt's eager admiration of French poetry finds a suitable memorial in *A Sheaf gleaned in French Fields*. The book contains translations of about two hundred poems by seventy or eighty different authors and this, with Toru's notes, bears testimony to her wide knowledge and appreciation of French poetry. *The Sheaf* was first published without a preface by the Saptahik Sambad Press,

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, by Harihar Das, p. 309.

<sup>2</sup> *A Sheaf gleaned in French Fields*, by Toru Dutt (Kegan Paul), p. 6.



Bhowanipore, and was dedicated to her father. In India it was accredited to some Anglo-Indian, who was thought to be writing under an Indian pseudonym. Its bad get-up hampered its appreciation in the West. Fortunately it fell into the hands of good critics like Edmund Gosse in England and André Thuriot in France. The latter reviewed it in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Mr. Gosse wrote in *The Examiner*<sup>1</sup> praising it highly. Toru generally translated poems which, broadly speaking, belonged to the Romantic School of French poetry, though she does not confine herself within those limits. Victor Hugo, the chief poet of this school, naturally occupies a prominent place in this anthology. Other well known names associated with this movement are also represented—Gautier and Gerard de Nerval, Deschamps and others. Later poets such as Banville, Leconte de Lisle, Baudelaire, Soulayr, Sully, Prudhomme and Coppée are also included. We get a few pieces, too, from transition poets, such as Chenier, Courier, Beranger and Lamartine. She even gives us translations from some poets earlier than this period—Parny and de Florian of the 18th century and Corneille of the 17th century. Besides this she includes such poets as de Vigny, de Musset, Barbier, Brizeux,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Toru's letters—*Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, by Harihar Das, p. 223.



Moreau, Dupoint and de Laprade, who stand somewhat apart from the Romantic school.

Her choice of the poems of these authors is more difficult to account for. It is indeed a sheaf which the writer has gathered according to her whim, culling a poem here and there. The best poets, even those she admires most, have not the greatest amount of space given to them. Often, too, we do not get the best poems of the writers. But the pieces are all translated with care and precision. Toru clung as far as possible to the original and does not seem to have lost much thereby. The two pieces of de Vigny, which she has translated successfully, give us his quiet reflection and simplicity. In *Moses*<sup>1</sup> we sometimes recapture the very music of the French poem. As in the original, the burden of loneliness that weighs Moses down, is reflected in the burden of the poem—

“Mighty and lonely from alas my birth !  
Now let me sleep, the sleep of the earth.”

The sublime pathos of the *Death of the Wolf*,<sup>2</sup> as well as the stoic pride of these ‘lords of the forest’ is brought out well in the translation. *What the Swallows say*<sup>3</sup> by Theophile Gautier, seems to

<sup>1</sup> *A Sheaf gleaned in French Fields* (Kegan Paul), p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 184.



us also to be very well translated. The rhythm though quite simple is very musical :

“ Leaves not green, but red and gold,  
Fall and dot the yellow grass ;  
Morn and eve the wind is cold,  
Sunny days are gone alas !

Showers lift bubbles in the pool,  
Peasants harvest work despatch;  
Winter comes apace to rule,  
Swallows chatter on the thatch.

Hundreds, hundreds, of the race  
Gathered hold a high debate,  
One says, Athens is my place,  
Thither shall I emigrate.

\*

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All they say I understand  
For the poet is a bird,  
Captive, broken-winged, and banned,  
Struggling still though oft unheard.”

Aru's contribution to the book consists of some eight poems. As in the case of Toru's poems, there is a great inequality in their standard of merit. There is, however, one exquisite little poem, a translation from Victor Hugo—

“ Still barred the doors ! The far East glows,  
The morning wind blows, fresh and free,  
Should not the hour that wakes the rose  
Awaken also thee ?



*Chorus—*

No longer sleep,  
O listen now—  
I wait and weep,  
But where art thou ?

All look for thee, Love, Light and Song,  
Light in the sky deep red above;  
Song in the lark of pinion strong,  
And in my heart true love.

*Chorus—*

No longer sleep, etc.

Apart we miss our nature's goal  
Why strive to cheat our destinies,  
Was not my love made for thy soul,  
Thy beauty for mine eyes ?

*Chorus—*

No longer sleep, etc." <sup>1</sup>

It would perhaps be fitting to end this brief notice of *The Sheaf* with Sir Edmund Gosse's appreciation of it.

"*The Sheaf gleaned in French Fields* is certainly the most imperfect of Toru's writings, but it is not the least interesting. It is a wonderful mixture of strength and weakness—weakness overriding

<sup>1</sup> *A Sheaf gleaned in French Fields* (Kegan Paul), p. 77. This poem was wrongly attributed by Sir Edmund Gosse to Toru Dutt. Mr. E. J. Thompson was the first to discover the mistake.



great obstacles and talent succumbing to ignorance. That it should be performed at all is so extraordinary, that we forget to be surprised at its inequality. The English verse is sometimes exquisite, at other times the rules of our prosody are absolutely ignored, and it is obvious that the Hindu poetess is chanting to herself a music that is discord to an English ear. The notes are no less curious and to a stranger no less bewildering. Nothing could be more naive than the writer's ignorance of some points or more startling than her learning in others. On the whole the attainment of the book was astounding." <sup>1</sup>

### *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindusthan.*

Perhaps no time is more attractive in India than the quiet evening when the gorgeous colours have faded from the west ; a few stars twinkle in the skies and the golden moon slowly emerges from the eastern horizon. At this hour one sees bands of little children grouped round some grey-haired elder. The place of rendezvous is usually the terrace, the verandah, or the inner courtyard. Cool breezes play with the damp hair of the children as they sit or lie on the still warm ground, their eager little limbs at last at rest, their faces absorbed and full of rapt attention. There is the young

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindusthan*, pp. 15 and 16.



lad lying flat on his back, who snatches an hour to enjoy the cool breezes before more earnest work occupies him. There too is the little bride who bends her shy head over the betel leaves, which her busy fingers arrange. And they all listen to the quick picturesque stream of language which flows from the mouth of the grey-haired elder, as he pieces together in child words that so suit them—those ancient stories,—stories which have comforted generations of children and formed their thoughts and ideas,—stories whose originals were sung in divine poetry thousands of years ago by poet sages. These are the stories that Toru Dutt treats of, in her *Ancient Ballads and Legends*, and for the first time reveals to the West the Soul of India through the medium of English poetry. Perhaps this is the chief reason why the *Ancient Ballads* deserve to live, for though they have faults enough, it is the first time that an Indian girl who has not yet lost the child mind has enshrined these old stories in English verse. How different from the pseudo-Indian themes, that were handled till then by her predecessors. Toru Dutt's first experiments at handling Indian themes were her translations of two stories taken from the Vishnu Purana: the legend of Dhruba, published in the *Bengal Magazine* in 1876, and *The Royal Ascetic and the Hind*, published in the *Bengal Magazine* in 1877. She seems to have had the idea of presenting some of the better known stories from



Sanskrit literature to English readers for appreciation and sympathy. A series of nine was contemplated, but she had time to write seven only, so the gaps were filled up by including the *Legend of Dhruva* and *The Royal Ascetic and the Hind*, which were not part of her original scheme.

The last two were written in blank verse, and Toru shows considerable skill in handling this kind of versification, but there is not much which is very original in either. Toru enters more into the spirit of Dhruva, for she was a great lover of children. *Savitri* is the finest of the poems, dealing with Epic legends. Toru's *Savitri* is however different from the *Savitri* of Indian legend, for while the latter was a part of her husband, the former claims an individuality and personality distinct from her husband :—

“ He for his deeds shall get his due  
As I for mine : Thus here each soul  
Is its own friend if it pursue  
The right, and run straight for the goal,  
But its own worst and direst foe  
If it chose evil and in tracks  
Forbidden for its pleasure go.  
Who knows not this true wisdom lacks.”<sup>1</sup>

Such an idea is quite alien to ancient Indian thought. Modern ideas like this however can be found in almost all the poems. In *The Royal*

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient Ballads and Legends*, p. 31.



*Ascetic and the Hind*, Toru reads a little lecture to the ascetics for their renunciation of the world. This is both naive and interesting because it shows how absolutely out of sympathy Toru, with her modern and western upbringing, was with the old ideals.

Thus she says—

“ What ! a sin to love !  
A sin to pity ! Rather we deem  
Whatever Brahmins wise or monks may hold  
That he had sinned in casting off all love  
By his retirement to the forest shade—  
For that was to abandon duties high,  
And like a recreant soldier leave the post  
Where God had placed him as a sentinel.”<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes too we get a fine description of nature as the detailed descriptions of Indian trees in *Buttoo*.<sup>2</sup> *Sita* is a memory picture drawn from Toru's happy childhood, and is both tender and beautiful. We see the children's eager imagination working up a picture as the words fall from their mother's lips :—

“ A dense, dense forest, where no sun-beam pries,  
And in its centre a cleared spot—there blooms  
Gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace  
Tall trees; there in a quiet lucid lake  
The white swans glide ; where whirring from the brake

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient Ballads and Legends*, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 77.



The peacock springs; there herds of wild deer race ;  
There patches gleam with yellow waving grain ;  
There blue smoke from strange altars rises light,  
There dwells in peace the poet anchorite." <sup>1</sup>

*Jogadhaya Uma* <sup>2</sup> is unique amongst the collection for its dreamy beauty. The story is drawn not from the epic but from the Puranas. With rapid touches Toru paints a homely pedlar, the radiant goddess and a kindly old priest. For the background we have the red road running to Khirogram, the meadows in which the cattle dream in 'knee-deep grass,' and the solitary figures dotting the road as they go intent on their work. Then we have the 'lake-like' tank surrounded by fruit trees with its marble steps near which the interview between the pedlar and the goddess takes place. A description of the village with its beautiful temple follows, and at last we are left with a picture of the lonely ghat bathed in midday hush and the figures of the old priest and simple pedlar, their faces full of awe and wonder. The Indian atmosphere of the poem is sometimes spoilt by the rather jarring introduction of English associations. Thus the word 'manse' for a priest's house is anything but a fitting name. Again the trim village scene seems to be more English than Indian.

*The Miscellaneous Poems* at the end of the volume though few in number seem to us the best. Intensely personal, in them Toru found her true

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient Ballads and Legends*, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 70.



sphere of expression. It is in these five or six poems in which Toru sings of herself and her surroundings that she really reveals herself.

*Near Hastings*<sup>1</sup> is a touching little poem. Two sisters loitering on the beach, both strangers to the country and one an invalid, a compassionate lady who gives the invalid sister some flowers, just an act of simple kindness, and the incident is enshrined in a grateful poem. The two poems on France and French affairs—*France in 1870*<sup>2</sup> and *On the fly leaf of Erchmann Chatrian's novel entitled 'Madame Therese'*<sup>3</sup> though irregular and jerky in the versification reveal Toru's strength and passion.

The *Tree of Life*<sup>4</sup> is the description of a waking vision. The poem is full of strange imaginings;—

“ It was an open plain  
Illimitable—stretching, stretching  
Oh! so far!  
And o'er it that strange light—a glorious light  
Like that the stars shed over fields of snow  
In a clear, cloudless frosty night,  
Only intenser in its brilliance.”

In the *Lotus*<sup>5</sup> and *Baugmaree*, Toru shows her command of the sonnet form. In the latter,

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient Ballads and Legends*, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 133.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 131.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 136.



especially, she shows a maturer genius. It is descriptive of their country residence :—

“ A sea of foliage girds our garden round,  
But not a sea of dull unvaried green,  
Sharp contrasts of all colours here are seen—  
The light green graceful tamarinds abound,  
Amid the mango-clumps profound  
The palms arise like pillars grey between  
And o’er the quiet pools the seemuls lean  
Red—red and startling like a trumpet’s sound.  
But nothing can be lovelier than the ranges  
Of bamboos to the eastward when the moon  
Looks through the gaps, and the white lotus changes  
Into a cup of silver. One might swoon  
Drunken with beauty, then ; or gaze and gaze  
On a primeval Eden in amaze.” <sup>1</sup>

Here we get no introduction of English associations to mar the effect. It is a very simple yet perfect description of an Indian garden.

*Our Casuarina Tree* shows Toru’s mastery over more elaborate verse structures. Its simple yet elevated style recalls Wordsworth and is in strong contrast to the elaborate imagery used by the writers of English verse whom we have mentioned up till now. In the first two stanzas with a few skilful touches she conjures up the picture of the tree,

“ Like a huge python winding round and round,  
The rugged trunk indented deep with scare

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient Ballads and Legends*, p. 136.



Up to its very summit near the stars  
 A creeper climbs in whose embraces bound  
 No other tree could live. But gallantly  
 The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung  
 In crimson clusters all the boughs among,  
 Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee ;  
 And oft at night the garden overflows  
 With one sweet song which seems to have no close  
 Sung darkling from our tree while men repose.

“ When first my casement is wide open thrown  
 At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest ;  
 Sometimes and most in winter, on its crest  
 A grey baboon sits statue-like alone,  
 Watching the sunrise, while on lower boughs  
 His puny offspring leap about and play ;  
 And far and near kokillas hail the day ;  
 And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows  
 And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast,  
 The water lilies spring, like snow enmassed.”

In the fourth stanza we get a romantic, almost Keatsian touch—

“ Ah ! I have heard that wail, far, far away,  
 In distant lands by many a sheltered bay  
 When slumbered in his cave the water wraith  
 And the waves gently kissed the classic shore  
 Of France and Italy beneath the moon,  
 When earth and sky lay tranced in a dream-  
 less swoon.”<sup>1</sup>

Both “ *Our Casuarina Tree* ” and “ *Baugmaree* ” show Toru Dutt reaching a riper perfection. In

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient Ballads and Legends*, p. 137, etc.





them we find the mellow sweetness, the lack of which strikes Edmund Gosse. Had Toru lived we may have hoped that she would have shed many of her early blemishes and risen to be a great poetess. As it is Edmund Gosse writes—

“When the history of the literature of our country comes to be written, there is sure to be a page in it, dedicated to this fragile exotic blossom of song.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ancient Ballads and Legends*, Introduction by Edmund Gosse, p. 27.



## CHAPTER V

### SELECTED WRITERS (*continued*)

SAROJINI NAIDU AND HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAY

#### *Sarojini Naidu.*

We saw in our last chapter on Toru Dutt, that the young poetess struck a new and entirely different note in her few short lyrics published at the end of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. In them she broke away from formal imitation of English poets and the conventional imagery used by earlier writers. Instead she drew her inspiration from the sights and sounds around her, and gave expression to emotions which had passed through the crucible of her own heart. Her early death prevented her from developing on these lines and it was left to her brilliant successor, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, to accomplish that which she had failed to do. The three volumes of poetry that Mrs. Naidu has published are full of poignant feeling and picturesque Indian imagery.

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu was born in Hyderabad on February 13th, 1879. Her father was Dr. Aghorenath Chattopadhyay. Dr. Chattopadhyay took his degree in Science at Edinburgh University and on his return founded the Nizam College in



Hyderabad. In one of her poems, Mrs. Naidu commemorates him thus—

“ Farewell ! Farewell ! O brave and tender sage,  
Selfless, serene, untroubled, unbeguiled  
By trivial snares of grief and greed or rage,  
O splendid dreamer in a dreamless age  
Whose deep alchemic vision reconciled  
Time’s changing message with the undefiled  
Calm wisdom of the Vedic heritage.”<sup>1</sup>

Aghorenath Chattopadhyay gave his daughter a purely scientific education and was resolved that she should be either a mathematician or a scientist. But destiny willed otherwise and when she was only eleven years old she wrote her first poem. From that day, she says, her poetic career began. She wrote a poem of 1,300 lines in imitation of *The Lady of the Lake*, and a drama of 2,000 lines. At twelve she matriculated at Madras University and being the first girl to do so her fame spread far and wide. Her health however broke down and she gave up regular studies, but continued to read voraciously and wrote a great deal. She writes, “I suppose the greater part of my reading was done between fourteen and sixteen. I wrote a novel, I wrote fat volumes of journals, I took myself very seriously in those days.”<sup>2</sup> At fifteen she fell in love with Dr. Naidu whom she afterwards married; there was great

<sup>1</sup> *Broken Wing*, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> *The Golden Threshold*, Introduction, p. 12.



opposition on both sides because of the difference of caste. In 1895 she was sent to England with a special scholarship from the Nizam. In England she studied first at King's College, London, and then at Girton, Cambridge. We get a good picture of her at this time from the pen of Arthur Symons. "To those who knew her in England, all the life of the tiny figure seemed to concentrate itself in the eyes; they turned towards beauty as the sunflower turns towards the sun, opening wider and wider until one saw nothing but the eyes. She was dressed always in clinging dresses of eastern silk and as she was so small and her long black hair hung straight down her back you might have taken her for a child. She spoke little and in a low voice, like gentle music, and she seemed, wherever she was, to be alone."<sup>1</sup>

Arthur Symons goes on to describe her wisdom, maturity, and intellect. But what impressed him most was—"something else, something hardly personal, something that belonged to a consciousness older than the Christian, which I realised, wondered at, and admired in her, a passionate tranquillity of mind, before which everything mean and trivial and temporary caught fire and burnt away in smoke. Her body was never without suffering or her heart without conflict, but neither the body's weakness nor the heart's violence

<sup>1</sup> *The Golden Threshold*, Introduction, p. 15.



could disturb the fixed contemplation as of Buddha on his Lotus Throne.”<sup>1</sup>

During her stay in England she visited Italy and her passionate soul, so delicately responsive, was stirred to its depths in that land of natural beauty and wonderful art hallowed by time and associations. Looking out on Florence she exclaims, “God, how beautiful it is and how glad I am that I am alive to-day.” She drinks in the beauty like wine “golden and scented and shining fit for the gods; and the gods have drunk it, the dead gods of Etruria, two thousand years ago—did I say dead? No, for the gods are immortal and one might still find them loitering in some solitary dell on the grey hillsides of Fiesole. Have I seen them? Yes, looking with dreaming eyes I have found them sitting under the olives in their grave, strong, antique beauty—Etruscan gods.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1898 her health broke down and she returned to India. In December of the same year breaking through the bonds of caste, she married Dr. Naidu. We get a glimpse of her happy married life in one of her letters. Referring to her health she says—“It is all I need to make life perfect, for the spirit of delight of which Shelley wrote dwells in my little house; it is full

<sup>1</sup> *The Golden Threshold*, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Introduction, p. 21.



of music of birds in the garden and children in the long arched verandah."

In Hyderabad she was a great social force making for harmony and happiness. The following extract from Dever's *English Women in India* bears testimony to this aspect of her life. Speaking of Mrs. Naidu he says—"She now lives in Hyderabad, the great veiled city, where the women behind the *purdah* are great Arabic and Persian scholars, besides being well read in the best literature of the East. Here Mrs. Naidu holds a unique position between the English and Indian social elements. She lives in a city where poetry is in the air, surrounded by beauty and admiration and her influence behind the *purdah* is very great." To-day Mrs. Naidu is known not only in India but all over the world as a wonderful and powerful speaker. She is no longer the shy poetess of whom Arthur Symonds wrote—"Pain and pleasure transported her, and the whole of pain and pleasure might be held in a flower's cup or the imagined frown of a friend, it was never found in those things which seemed to others of importance." All the energy of her passionate and poetic soul she has thrown into the service of her motherland. For some time now Mrs. Naidu has been a powerful figure in Indian politics. But how is it that a delicate soul, living in a dreamland of beauty and



the ideal, could enter the sordid regions of politics ? Poets ere now have been animated to work for great causes and it is to the cause of Liberty that Mrs. Naidu has dedicated herself. It is interesting to note that so many Indian leaders are not politicians and men of the world, but idealists and dreamers.

We have seen that Mrs. Naidu began writing verse very early. There was however nothing good or original in these early attempts and they have, it appears, been wisely excluded from her published works. Edmund Gosse writes, "The verses which Sarojini entrusted to me were skilful in form, correct in grammar and blameless in sentiment, but they had the disadvantage of being totally without individuality. They were Western in feeling and imagery, they were founded on reminiscences of Tennyson and Shelley. I am not sure they did not even breathe an atmosphere of Christian resignation. I laid them down in despair."<sup>1</sup> Edmund Gosse told Sarojini Naidu that what was expected of an Indian poetess was not a mere *rechauffe* of Anglo-Saxon sentiment in an Anglo-Saxon setting but "some revelation of the heart of India, some sincere penetrating of native passion, and of the principles of an antique religion and of such mysterious intimation as stirred the soul of the East long before the

<sup>1</sup> *The Bird of Time*, Introduction, p. 5.



West had begun to dream that it had a soul." He asked her, "to describe the flowers, the fruits, the trees, to set her poems firmly on the mountain gardens, the temples: to introduce the vivid population of her voluptuous and unfamiliar province;—in other words to be a genuine Indian poet of the Deccan and not a clever machine-made imitator of the English classics."<sup>1</sup> Sarojini Naidu took to heart this advice and from that day gave up singing about 'robins and sky larks.' In her dedication of the *Golden Threshold*, Sarojini Naidu gracefully acknowledges her debt. "Dedicated to Edmund Gosse who first showed me the way to the Golden Threshold." It would be interesting before writing about her poetical works to review the influence under which Mrs. Naidu's genius matured. We have seen that she came to England when but sixteen years old. She was peculiarly fortunate in falling into an atmosphere congenial to her. She knew more or less intimately all the rising literary men of the times, and had as guide an experienced, recognised literary critic, a man of wide sympathies like Edmund Gosse.

Sarojini Naidu's youth was passed during a time of great literary ferment. The poetry of the nineties was a decided breaking away from the Victorian traditions. For half a century Tennyson

<sup>1</sup> *The Bird of Time*, Introduction, p. 5.



had been adored as the literary god of England. A poetic convention of smooth flowing verse, pretty epithets and onomatopoeic ornamentation was set up, and a great deal of work full of watery sentimentality was produced. Even while Tennyson was alive we see a reaction setting on. The rugged simplicity of Browning, the vehement passion of the pre-Raphaelites, and Arnold's purely classical form and thought, showed that a revolt against this tradition had already come. The young enthusiasts of the nineties completely broke it down. There was no longer the sentimental deification of Nature and Chivalry. It was life real and throbbing that they would express. They would no longer sing of the quiet countryside with its lowing kine and distant church bells. They sought their inspiration rather in the thronging streets and glittering lights, the life and movement of cities.

Sarojini Naidu has inherited some of these characteristics. Her genius is essentially lyrical and her poetry full of music. But in trying to sing of Indian life she has succumbed to the temptation of making it picturesque. By doing this she merely continues the tradition of Anglo-Indian writers who would make India a land of romance and mystery. The song of the palanquin-bearers, the flute music of the snake-charmer, an old beggar sitting in the street—all these she surrounds with a halo of romance. Thus she



makes her beggar minstrels sing—

“ What hopes shall we gather? What dreams shall  
we sow ?  
 Where the wind calls our wandering footsteps we go,  
 No love bids us tarry, no joy bids us wait :  
 The voice of the wind, is the voice of our fate.” <sup>1</sup>

Again we have at times the introduction of a note of mysticism, of the supernatural, as in the village song—

“ The bridal songs, the cradle songs have cadences  
of sorrow,  
 The laughter of the sun to-day, the wind of death  
to-morrow.  
 For sweeter than the forest notes where forest  
streams are falling :  
 O mother mine, I cannot stay, the fairy folks are  
calling.” <sup>2</sup>

Or in the *Festival of Serpents*,—

“ Swift are ye as streams and soundless as the  
dew-fall  
 Subtle as the lightning and splendid as the sun :  
 Seers are ye and symbols of the ancient silence,  
 Where life and death and sorrow and ecstasy  
are one.” <sup>3</sup>

There is another aspect of her poetry which we must mention, *i. e.*, the philosophic aspect. We find this in poems like *Life, Past and Future*,

<sup>1</sup> *The Golden Threshold*, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> *The Bird of Time*, p. 67.



etc. We get the attitude of Vaishnava philosophy with its mystic rapturous devotion in the *Flute Player of Brindaban* :

“ Still must I like a homeless bird  
Wander forsaking all  
The earthly loves, the worldly lure  
That held my life in thrall.  
And follow, follow, answering  
Thy magical flute call.  
“ No peril in the deep or height,  
Shall daunt my winged foot,  
No fear of time, unconquered space,  
Or light untravelled route  
Impede my heart that pants to drain  
The nectar of thy flute.”<sup>1</sup>

The best of her philosophic poems seems to us, however, to be “*On a Buddha seated on a Lotus.*” The poem consists of five stanzas only, but in them she sums up the whole spirit of Buddhistic teaching. It seems to us to be one of her best poems both as regards form and subject, for in it she leaves off toying with the painted exterior of life and enters the very spirit of the people, engrained in them through years of religious instruction. In the last two stanzas she gives the yearning of the human soul for the divine.

“ With futile hands we seek to gain  
Our inaccessible desire,  
Diviner summits to attain,  
With faith that sinks and feet that tire,

<sup>1</sup> *The Broken Wing*, p. 23.



But nought shall conquer or control  
The heavenward hunger of the soul.

“ The end, elusive and afar,  
Still lures us with its beckoning flight,  
And all our mortal moments are  
A session of the Infinite.  
How shall we reach the great Unknown,  
Nirvana of the lotus throne.” <sup>1</sup>

We should note Mrs. Naidu's power of drawing vivid pictures. She has the gift of silhouetting a picture in a few lines :—

“ An ox-cart stumbles upon the rock,  
A wistful music pursues the breeze  
From a shepherd's pipe as he gathers his flock  
Under pekul trees—  
And a young Banjara driving her cattle  
Lifts up her voice as she glitters by,  
In an ancient ballad of love and battle  
Set to the beat of a mystic tune,  
And the faint stars gleam in an early sky  
To herald a rising moon.” <sup>2</sup>

There are many such descriptions in her poetry. Sometimes they are touched with a wand of fairy-like fancy as when she writes in the *Golden Cassia*—

“ Perchance you are O frail and sweet !  
Bright anklet bells from the wild Spring's feet.”

<sup>1</sup> *The Golden Threshold*, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> *The Broken Wing*, p. 55.



Her poems, however, suffer by being too ornate.

“ A caste mark on the azure brow of heaven  
The golden moon burns sacred solemn bright,”

is indeed a striking metaphor, but one gets rather tired of the brilliant metaphors and similes. They introduce an element of artificiality in her poems. It makes them as exotics that wither and die when compared to the natural simplicity and bare beauty of the work of the greatest artists. A few of her poems seem to be written only for the sake of the metaphors and similes and are merely dressed up to display the features of poetic style:—such as the poems on *Suttee*, *In Praise of Gold Mohor Blossoms*, etc.

Mrs. Naidu's love poems are full of passionate feeling. But there is, at times, a want of artistic restraint in the expression of these feelings which repels one, as when she writes—

“ Hide me in a shrine of roses,  
Drown me in a wine of roses,  
Drawn from every fragrant grove;  
Bind me in a pyre of roses,  
Burn me in a fire of roses,  
Crown me with the rose of love.”<sup>1</sup>

As James Cousins very aptly remarks,<sup>2</sup> how is it possible to burn her in a pyre of roses after

<sup>1</sup> *The Broken Wing*, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> James Cousins, *Renaissance of India*, chapter on Sarojini Naidu.



she has been drowned ! and still more, how is she to be revived and crowned with the rose of love after she has been burned. In her unrestrained feelings Mrs. Naidu sometimes forgets all logical sequence, and gives expression to absurdities. Again, the following poem is repelling in its excess—

“ Take my flesh and feed your dogs if you choose,  
Water your garden trees with my blood if you will,  
Turn my heart into ashes, my dreams into dust—  
Am I not yours, O love to cherish or kill.” <sup>1</sup>

The artificiality of Mrs. Naidu's poems is increased by the repetition of vernacular words which have no meaning or association for the English reader and seem only something fantastic—words, in fact, which even in their native language have no poetic value such as ‘ *Y Allah, Y Allah* ’ or ‘ *Ram re Ram*. ’ Even though the words have a religious association to the Indian mind that is no reason for introducing them into poetry, for it results in a kind of pseudo-Indianism, or a thin veneer of Indianism which deceives nobody.

In Mrs. Naidu's treatment of Indian subjects she does not give a realistic picture of India ; she merely continues the picture of India painted by Anglo-Indian and English writers, a land of bazaars, full of bright colours and perfumes, and

<sup>1</sup> *The Broken Wing*, p. 108.



peopled with picturesque beggars, wandering minstrels and snake-charmers.

She is more intent on drawing an interesting picture of India than on representing India as it is. It is this which makes her verses rather disappointing. Talented and with not a little of the gift of the true poet, it seems to us Mrs. Naidu has failed in becoming a true interpreter of India to the West.

### *Harindranath Chattopadhyay.*

A slim lad of sixteen with a handsome, sensitive face, dark lustrous eyes, and black silky hair falling about his neck and forehead was standing behind the footlights. This was my first sight of Harindranath Chattopadhyay. It was the year 1914 after the production of his musical comedy *Abu Hussain* at private theatricals in Calcutta, and we were just being introduced to the young author. Harindranath is one of the youngest writers of English verse. He is the youngest son of Aghorenath Chattopadhyay and is a younger brother of Sarojini Naidu. He is a good musician and has considerable dramatic powers. As has already been mentioned Harindranath produced a musical comedy called *Abu Hussain* when he was only sixteen, and was at once hailed by his friends as a genius. The play has, however, no literary value at all. The plot is full of rather boisterous fun



and frolic and the only thing in its favour is that the boy writer seems to have entered into the spirit of the Arabian Nights from which the plot is taken. The songs are neither lyrical nor poetical, but are a sort of clever doggerel.

In 1918 with the appearance of *The Feast of Youth*, the young poet was first introduced to the literary public. James Cousins, a minor Irish poet and the Principal of the Adyar College, Madras, wrote the introduction. In it he writes, "I here unblushingly—nay with pride—introduce this dangerous young poet. The poet within me rises above the jungles and swamps of the mind to some quiet hill-top in which he makes salutation to a comrade born with a new and compelling vision and utterance which are, after all, all that really matters to the soul of humanity in its hunger and thirst for articulation.....Harindranath Chattopadhyay is, I am convinced, a true bearer of the fire—not the hectic transient blaze of youthfulness but the incorruptible and inextinguishable flame of the immortal youth which sustains the worlds, visible and invisible." <sup>1</sup> This praise is no doubt both premature and exaggerated. But it is not surprising that Cousins' metaphysical mind found more delight in Harindranath's poetry than the ordinary reader would. We shall consider *The Feast of Youth* along with his later volumes "*The*

<sup>1</sup> *Grey Clouds and White Showers*, p. 17.



*Magic Tree*," "*Perfume of Earth*," etc., as they all are of the same type.

In 1919 Harindranath published the *Coloured Garden*. The book consists of verses for children and is dedicated to his little playmate and sister. It seems to us to be inspired somewhat by Tagore's verses for children, but lacks the freshness and charm of many of Tagore's verses. In Tagore both the artist and child is writing, but in Harindranath the child is more evident than the artist.

*The Magic Tree*, *Perfume of Earth*, *Ancient Wings* and *Grey Clouds and White Showers* were published within the years 1922-24. Like *The Feast of Youth*, they contain lyrics of a reflective and philosophic nature.

Harindranath versifies ideas of Hindu philosophy, and though at first it seems that these ideas come naturally it soon becomes evident that the philosophic and religious tone of the poems is rather a pose. Besides, there is a certain monotony in his references to such ideas as those of re-incarnation, freedom from the world's bondage, the search of the human soul for the Divine. Harindranath is at his best when he is describing Indian scenes. He seems to recapture the subtle atmosphere, which pervades these scenes. Thus in *Nocturnal* we get the mood of the poet brought on as he watches

"The starry worshippers,  
Seeking the floating temple of the moon." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Feast of Youth*.



*Contentment* gives the spirit which permeates everything at dusk. It shows the sweetness and simplicity of a peasant's life. *The Village Image*<sup>1</sup> is a good word-picture. The last stanza reproduces the atmosphere of the time and place.

" Beyond the trees while the grey shades were falling  
The evening star was threshed from out its husk,  
And a lone peasant's voice was calling, calling,  
Out to a peasant woman in the dusk."

In *The Peasant*, Harindranath draws a lovely silhouette which gives the impression of large spaces and quiet reflectiveness so characteristic of Indian scenes—

" At the foot of tall palmyra tree  
A peasant old and grey  
Sat and watched the lonely sky  
At the dim blue end of day.

" He sat alone and his body seemed  
Part of the fields of rice,  
That lend themselves to the hungry scythe  
In silent sacrifice.

" All quietly he sat and watched  
The vast and lonely sky,  
As if he hid in his simple faith  
The ultimate reply." <sup>2</sup>

*The Clouded Night*<sup>3</sup> gives a very familiar aspect of nature in India;—the sultry starless night

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient Wings*, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> *Grey Clouds and White Showers*, p. 25.



when only the fitful glowworm or the solitary lantern of the lone traveller throws a gleam of light. Then suddenly the rain comes with quick showers till it stops as suddenly and

“ The stars come out and the skies are freed,  
Within the house a new-born infant sleeps,  
Beside its mother—While the darkness creeps  
Through an old habit towards dawn.”

Like his sister, Harindranath is very partial to the use of metaphors and similes. Sometimes they are striking as in *Camels* :—

“ Cloud camels wander in the skies  
Dim deserts lone and bare  
A tinkling star like silver bells,  
Among the dusky air.”<sup>1</sup>

The best example of the boldness of his similes is seen in the *Noon* :—

“ The noon a mystic dog with paws of fire,  
Runs through the sky in ecstasy of drouth  
Licking the earth with a tongue of golden flame  
Set in a burning mouth.

“ It floods the forest with loud barks of delight,  
And chases its own shadow in the plain,  
Its Master hath set it free  
Awhile from its silver chain.

“ At last towards the cinctured end of day,  
It drinks cool draughts from sunsets' mellow rills,  
Then chained to twilight by its Master's hand  
It sleeps among the hills.”

<sup>1</sup> *Perfume of Earth*, p. 24.



It is not strange that these far-fetched metaphors introduce an element of artificiality into his poems. Sometimes too, they detract from the clearness of the meaning, making his poems obscure.

In 1925 Harindranath published two plays in verse consisting of one act each. The author tells us that they are the beginning of a series of plays entitled *Lives of the Saints*. The two plays in question dramatise two South Indian legends. One is in connection with the origin of the temple at Pandarpur and is called *Pundalik*, the other is about the life of *Saku Bai* who was considered a saint. The plays have little of the dramatic element in them. There is a great deal of mysticism and philosophy in them. On the whole they read quite well.

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## CHAPTER VI

### SELECTED WRITERS (*continued*)

MANMOHAN GHOSE AND ARAVINDO GHOSE

#### *Manmohan Ghose.*

Manmohan Ghose was the second son of Dr. K. D. Ghose and Swarnalata Ghose, daughter of Raj Narayan Bose, one of the great figures of the 19th century Bengal. He was born on the 19th January, 1867, at Bhagalpur where his father was in the medical service. Like so many Bengalees of his generation Dr. K. D. Ghose had a whole-hearted belief in Western education, and at the age of five Manmohan with his brothers, Benoy and Aravindo, were sent to the Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling. We can imagine these boys with deep, wistful eyes, earnest and thoughtful, for genius had marked two of them for her own, wandering amidst a band of English boys. In the shadow of the Himalayas, in sight of the wonderful snow-capped peaks, even in their native land they were brought up in alien surroundings. For Manmohan, at least, this was prophetic of his life. Two years afterwards he was left in England with his brothers in the care of Mr. Druette of Manchester. Manmohan Ghose always looked back with pleasure on these childish memories. He went to the Manchester Grammar



School, and here he first lisped in verse, being encouraged by the Head Master. In 1884 the Druettes left for Australia and Manmohan joined St. Paul's School, London. Mr. Laurence Binyon with whom he formed a deep and lifelong friendship was at the school, and we get a description of the dramatic nature of their first meeting in Mr. Binyon's introduction to Ghose's book, *'Songs of Love and Death.'*<sup>1</sup> Of his poetic tastes we learn, "He was well read in the English poets, better read than I in the Elizabethan and older lyrists. But what struck me most was his enthusiastic appreciation of Greek poetry, not so much of the books prescribed in the school as those which he had sought out on his own account. Theocritus, Meleager and above all Simonides, were his special favourites." This struck his friend with surprise and he continues, "I had imagined that an Oriental's tastes must of necessity be for the luxuriant and ornate, and was surprised that he should feel so strong an attraction for the limpid and severe.....Manmohan Ghose never forgot the Greeks, and to the end his delight was in European literature and European art."<sup>2</sup>

In 1887 Manmohan Ghose won an open Classical scholarship at Christ Church, Oxford. His academic career was rather chequered for lack of funds. His father towards the end of his life

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of Love and Death*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 9 and 10.



squandered all his money on worthless objects with the result that the children in England scarcely ever had regular supplies of money. When he died he left his affairs in great disorder and all money supplies were at once stopped. Manmohan took Responsions in the Hilary term, 1888, got a second in Moderations and read for Literae Humaniores for a year and a half. Before he could take final schools, reduced to utter destitution he had to leave Oxford. His life between this and 1893, when he went back to Oxford, joined the Non-Collegiate Students' Delegacy and took a Pass degree, was spent in great want. There were, however, compensating factors. In 1890 while he was still in Oxford, a small volume of poems entitled '*Prima Vera*,' the joint production of Laurence Binyon, Stephen Phillips, Arthur Cripps and Manmohan Ghose, was published. It met with great success and was reviewed at length in the *Academy* by Addington Symonds. Oscar Wilde reviewing it in the *Pall Mall Gazette* made particular reference to "the young Indian of brilliant scholarship and high literary attainments who gives some culture to Christ Church.....Mr. Ghose ought some day to make a name in our literature." While in London Manmohan Ghose formed friendships or acquaintanceships with many literary and artistic figures of the time, such as Stephen Phillips, Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Oscar Wilde and others. This atmosphere of intense intellectual and artistic



activity was very congenial to our poet and in later life he often looked back with longing to these earlier days. Laurence Binyon gives an interesting description of one of the meetings of these young enthusiasts of the nineties. "I recall an evening in the rooms of Percy Dearmer, at Christ Church, when there was a large gathering, chiefly to entertain some members of Frank Benson's Company, who were acting at the theatre. My cousin, Stephen Phillips, then remarkably handsome, was one of them. Lionel Johnson, curiously small and neat, was there; and his nervous mouth, and the pallor of his face, the intent eyes, as of one who never slept, the air of dominating intellect and learning combined with the extreme youthfulness of his person, made a singular impression. And I can still hear Manmohan Ghose standing up to read a poem in the crowded room. His long hair fell half over his eyes; as he read he detached one of his dark locks, and pulled at it with outstretched hand: oblivious of his surroundings, lost in the poem, he appeared almost convulsed in the emotional effort of its delivery."<sup>1</sup>

Manmohan Ghose could not forget, however, that he was an exile in England. In a poem written a little before he left England, he cries—

"Heaven be in thy sails, O unknown vessel,  
Till those heavenly shores grow into view,  
See my spirit, with no storm to wrestle,  
Follows, goes on wind-wings, thither too.

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of Love and Death*, p. 11.



“ For long miles into the heart of morning,  
Miles and miles, far over lands and seas,  
Past enchanted regions of forewarning,  
Dawns at last the land that dims all these.” <sup>1</sup>

In 1894 he went back to his native land which he had left as a child of eight. His first impressions were happy. He writes—“ I arrived on 25th October, and have since been staying at a beautiful country place called Baidyanath, in my grandfather’s house, all among the mountains and green sugar-cane fields and shallow rivers. My own people I find charming and cultivated folk, and spent an extremely pleasant time among them. This, I think very fortunate indeed—to find at once friends and that of one’s own blood, so congenial and interesting as soon as I landed.” <sup>2</sup>

But this first impression did not last. He had been away so long from India that he had forgotten his mother tongue, Bengali, which he had to re-learn, but he could not adapt himself to his surroundings. He writes a little later :—“ Green things are wonderful here, but brown things (*i. e.*, man) are absurdly out of sympathy with me, at least socially : from the outside, I confess they are full of interest ; so that in the midst of all this plenitude of bloom, I often remember dingy

<sup>1</sup> *Love Songs and Elegies*, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Songs of Love and Death*, p. 14.



London and then — *Surgit amari aliquid quod in ipsis floribus angat.*"<sup>1</sup> And again in 1897 he harps on the same note, "But then, too, I get tired of all this and long insatiably for some intellectual excitement, to have some one to talk about poetry with. There are people, of course, and plenty of charming enthusiasm (I have never been amongst a race so sensitive to poetry), but there is no true understanding of things."<sup>2</sup> Here we get what formed the true tragedy of his life in India. It was this want of intellectual sympathy and companionship—this isolation and uncongenial surroundings from which his genius could draw no true nourishment, and these made him feel doubly an exile in India.

Soon after his return to India in 1896, he was appointed Professor of English at Patna College. From here he was transferred to Calcutta, then to Dacca, and thence to Purulia, as Inspector of Schools, and back to Calcutta in 1905. At Dacca, in 1898, he married Malati Devi, the beautiful wife, whose life-long illness cast so much gloom over the poet's life. He had two daughters. The elder Mrinalini was born in 1900; the younger Latika in 1902. From 1903 he was settled in Calcutta and remained there as Professor of English Literature in the Presidency College. Here he lectured continuously for eighteen years. The wonderful charm

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of Love and Death*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.



of his lectures is borne witness to by many of his students.<sup>1</sup> "His lectures were more or less like overheard soliloquies.....He transmuted all knowledge into beauty like the silk-worm, which feeding on mulberry leaves, produces silk."<sup>2</sup> To hundreds of students he opened the gates of poetry. They would all date their appreciation of poetry to his influence. One of them says, "I would gratefully allow, if there is a bit of ground in my heart where poetry has a small garden and a humble altar, it is because the dust of his feet, as he walked across, gathered there through four short years and formed its soil."<sup>3</sup> A halo of romance and mystery surrounded Manmohan Ghose in the eyes of his pupils and effectively separated him from them; yet they loved and admired him more than any other Professor.<sup>4</sup> Those who saw him in his later days saw him as a "broken man who bore the countenance of one tragically fated."<sup>5</sup> Laurence Binyon gives us the key to this tragedy. "At last, during the war, he wrote. I then learnt the full tragedy that had befallen him. The beautiful and happy-natured wife, whom he worshipped with extreme devotion, had been stricken ten years before with a

<sup>1</sup> See Five Articles in *The Presidency College Magazine*, March, 1924.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Review*, June, 1924, p. 689.

<sup>3</sup> *The Presidency College Magazine*, March, 1924, p. 217.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 216.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 208.



mysterious nervous ailment, completely depriving her of speech, paralysing her right limbs and causing aversion from all food. For a space of five years there was a partial recovery. Then the malady which was combined with hysteric symptoms resumed its mastery. Day after day till the release of death, Manmohan's entire life was devoted between his college lecture-room, and the sick-room, where he devoted himself with unending patience to attending on the beloved sufferer. The prolonged nervous strain resulted in utter fatigue, utter despondency, and finally broke his health. The renunciation of all society prevented any compensating distraction. 'For years not a friendly step has crossed my threshold. With English people in India there can be only a nodding acquaintance or official connection, and with Indians my purely English upbringing and breeding puts me out of harmony, —denationalised,—that is the word for me.'<sup>1</sup>

In 1918, the shock of his wife's death broke down his health completely. Illness followed illness. Total loss of eyesight intervened. What this meant to him we can understand if we remember that he was a great scholar and a poet to whom reading and writing was the breath of life and to whom the loveliness of Nature was the one compensation in a land where

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of Love and Death*, p. 18.



only suffering had been his lot. Again one of his keenest pleasures, as Mr. Binyon tells us, was in pictures and sculpture. Much of his savings were spent in buying photographs and books of reproductions which he got from London and Italy, and he had spent many happy evenings in contemplating them.<sup>1</sup> In 1921 the failure of his eyesight compelled his retirement from service. But his courage never failed. Even then—blinded, broken in health and prematurely aged—he continued composing poetry. He was looking forward to once more returning to England, and his passage had been booked for March, 1924, but he died on the 4th of January, after an illness of two months, of heart disease. His daughter gives us a picture of the poet in his last years—“For hours he would sit wrapt in thought. The sun-set deepened into darker shades, twilight crept on apace, but my father sat in the darkening room looking straight before him, sometimes repeating a few lines aloud, unconscious of all that was going on around him. Always there was the same intense look in his eyes, the same radiance lit his face. As I looked, it seemed to me that I was gazing on the face of some ancient Yogi on the eve of gaining the fruits of his Yoga. And indeed, though much of my father’s work is incomplete, I think he has gained his Yoga for he

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of Love and Death*, p. 20.



has shown the power of poetry in strengthening and uplifting humanity and has succeeded in justifying the ways of God to men." <sup>1</sup>

We have already spoken of Manmohan Ghose's contribution to *Prima-Vera*. In 1898 he published "*Love Songs and Elegies*," a small booklet in Elkin Matthews' Shilling Garland series. Three of his poems were included in "*The Garland*" published in 1899. Other published pieces were scattered in various Indian magazines. In 1918, the late Dr. T. O. D. Dunn included a few of Ghose's lyrics in his *Bengali Book of English Verse*, praising the author highly in the introduction.

These were then the only published works of Ghose before his death. Amongst his unpublished works were many lyrics ; fragments of longer poems ; a fragment of a Drama ; an unfinished epic in blank verse on the subject of Perseus, the Gorgon-slayer ; another epic in short lyrical metre which, taking the Great War as centre, shows the significance of the whole history of mankind. But this latter creation, revealing the great scholarship of the poet's mind, was left unfinished. From this great mass of unpublished work, recently a selection of lyrics has been edited by Mr. Laurence Binyon, the poet's friend, who has also written the interesting introduction containing a memoir of the

<sup>1</sup> *The Presidency College Magazine*, March, 1924, p. 232.



poet's life, from which we have quoted. Though we have made some mention of his unpublished work, to show the range of Ghose's genius, yet we shall confine ourselves in the chapter to a study of his lyrical genius and of his published works which are mostly lyrics.

Manmohan Ghose is unique amongst Indian writers of English verse. Brought up from childhood on an education of which the European Classics formed the basis, and returning to India to a life of drudgery and domestic sorrow, he seemed to have neither the time nor desire to study the languages or thought of India. His uncongenial surroundings estranged him still more from his environment. He buried himself in the study of classical European art and literature with the result that his poetry is entirely Western in taste and allusion, and if at all he betrays his Indian origin he does so only by the passionate emotionalism which underlies almost all his lyrical verse. But in Ghose's poetry there is no want of restraint. The Greeks whom he loved had taught him to value the limpid and the severe. The influence of the Greeks is seen in this charming little poem, so exquisitely fashioned, full of the most beautiful movement and rhythm—

“ Over thy head, in joyful wanderings  
Through heaven's wide spaces, free,  
Birds fly with music in their wings,  
And from the blue rough sea



The fishes flash and leap;  
There is a life of loveliest things,  
O'er thee so fast asleep.

" In the deep West the heavens grow heavenlier  
Eve after eve; and still  
The glorious stars remember to appear;  
The roses on the hill  
Are fragrant as before;  
Only thy face of all that's dear  
I shall see never more." <sup>1</sup>

His early love songs are full of a wistful melancholy. He seems scarcely ever to forget that he is an exile in a strange land and his mind wanders to his native country :

" There, stretching lonely, do the giant mountains  
Rise with their ages of snows to heaven,  
Snows, the heart shudders, so far away seem they,  
Fearfully lovely." <sup>2</sup>

There is too a restlessness of spirit bred of youthful love and the poet seeks in vain for his *Old Sweet Quiet*.<sup>3</sup> In these early love songs there is an earnestness, a passionate reality. The lines glow with the warmth of emotion. But he never resorts to hyperbole or ornamentation. The very simplicity with which the feelings are portrayed increase their poignancy.

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of Love and Death*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.



“ Only when after pain there comes a languor,  
And that strong image fades awhile grown dimmer,  
Then do I something feel like peace, half hoping  
Almost for freedom.

But when I see her, and in mere stranger's greeting  
For one sweet moment feel her hand within mine,  
Oh, then through every vein quick shoots the fever,  
Shoots the old madness ;

Once again o'er me comes that spell so potent,  
Charmed by the sweet tones lost I sit in listening,  
At each look trembling, her heavenly eyes give me,  
Speechless with passion.

Drinking delicious fire, delicious anguish,  
Grown half immortal.—But ah! to what purpose  
Doth thy heart beat so, doth thy breath oppress thee?  
Vainly thou lovest !

Beautiful, distant as a star she smiles down  
In virgin silence on thy fevered passion.  
Passion ! She knows not what it means, in heavenly  
Quiet reposing.” <sup>1</sup>

*Immortal Eve* is a series of poems each consisting of four short stanzas and forming a sequence. They are a paeon in praise of his dead wife. There is a pleasing simplicity and freshness about them. At times there is a tender playfulness, and again a note of deep reflection and thoughtfulness. Sometimes, when the thought of parting

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of Love and Death*, p. 40.







Why, then, ah! do I tremble and pale at the  
   thought of thee, O Death,  
 And shivering, stand to take my plunge in that  
   infinite sea of breath ?  
 There are the lost joys of my life, far sunk  
   beyond rave and fret;  
 There are the souls of dreams unflowered,  
   and the roses of regret.  
 There is the sunken dreadful gold of the once  
   that might have been,  
 Shipwrecked memory anchors there, and my  
   dead leaves there are green.  
 Why in the merge of all with all by a plunge  
   recoverable,  
 Desperate diver shudder I from all pearls in  
   one shell;  
 For there more precious than all things lost is  
   the one that I let fall,  
 One heart brimful of love for me, her love  
   that encasketed all." <sup>1</sup>

"*Lines*" is reminiscent of the mood of the poet as he sat alone in his cottage in the Himalayas. The March winds howled outside, driving the rain against the misty window panes, through which was dimly discernible the two tall pines that stood before the cottage door. Utter desolation and loneliness echo in the mournful cadence of the poem, yet there is a touching simplicity about it :

" The wind without is weeping.  
                   Of the churchyard it tells,

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of Love and Death*, p. 99.



Where the daisies are creeping  
And the mute earth mournful swells.

The wind in the pine is solemn,  
Its great boughs sigh and groan.—  
The pine-tree like a column,  
Upon the hillside lone.

In a patter come the showers;  
Mournfully beats the rain;  
The landscape blurring, the flowers,  
It streams on the window pane.

I sit by the hearthfire lonely,  
Her vacant arm-chair by,  
And think of the sweet days only,  
When she sat smiling by.”<sup>1</sup>

Manmohan Ghose is a delightful Nature poet. He was never so pleased as when he could pass his days in intimate communion with Nature. His Calcutta house was a very oasis of green in a street lined with dusty, glaring, brick-walled houses. Flowering creepers covered the entire front of the bungalow leaving only a small porch for entrance, and twining lovingly round the windows. The front garden was a perfect medley of trees, shrubs, moss-grown paths and flower beds with bits of grassy lawn here and there. When his duties permitted he fled to the Himalayas. There he

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of Love and Death*, p. 121.



lived in a cottage alone by itself on the spur of a hill commanding a magnificent view of the snows with a rushing waterfall on either side. Mountain sheep and goats grazed on the hillsides, the many-tinted birds flitted from boulder to boulder, the wind whistled through the forest of deodars which lined a neighbouring hill, and from its gloom one could hear a distant cuckoo. But we do not find these scenes described in his poems. On the contrary his poems are full of Nature in England. He used to say—"The mind loves to dwell on what is past and what is distant from us." Perhaps this is why he dwelt lovingly on English scenes whilst he was in India. Some of his most beautiful Nature poems—*April*, *Autumn*, etc., were written while he was in India, a score of years after his return from England; yet English flowers bloom on every page and the English seasons pass as in a pageant before our eyes. Again it is the 'stately poplar,' 'the breezy birch,' "the mournful willow," 'the giant oak,' and 'the lady beech,' which find room in his verses. It is strange, after so many years, with what freshness of vision he sees everything; nor does he lose his very intimate touch with Nature. A quotation from *April*<sup>1</sup> will show that he does not miss a single little flower or forget their order of appearance. All the sights and sounds of Spring, its fresh gaiety, the tumultuous

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of Love and Death*, p. 143.



resurge of life, the very warmth in the air, are reflected in the poem.—

“ April delicious

Young, sunny maiden,  
Arch, gusty, capricious,  
With fresh flowers laden,

After dead winter long  
Thrill us with sweet bird-song,  
After dry March's drought,  
Blow from thy rainy mouth !

Hasten to kiss us  
With the fresh daffodil

Through and through golden !  
On green bank, by every rill

Pale cowslips embolden,  
And white narcissus  
Make o'er his dreaming pool  
His wan face beautiful  
Hang like a lover.

Set for the honey-bees  
Budding anemonies  
And pink white clover.

Now on the greening leas

Hasten, oh hasten up,  
In yellow companies

The laughing buttercup,  
And to the meadow-pomp  
Lure, lure the children out.  
In mad crowds with merry shout

To pull them, dance, and romp  
By their glad nurses.



And fresh green sights to woo,  
Thy lovely face to view  
Lure, lure the poet too,  
    Humming his verses !

I will not praise thee, April, if thou spare  
    Of all thy stormy freshness, one slant shower  
To take the grey east from the shrinking air  
And slake the wind-choked miserable parch  
Of a bleak world that trembles out of March.  
    I will not sing of thee unless thou flower  
    Millions of daisies, hour by sunlit hour,  
To jewel the simple grass out of the skies  
With less cold, nearer stars, and make earth  
    paradise."

The last eight lines show the weary Londoner watching with eager eyes each sign of spring. It is full of tenderness for the misery rampant in great cities.—

" Haste, April, upon city streets to blow  
    Thy purest, warmest breezes; fly beneath  
The flower-girl's rags, poor beggary's basket stow  
With lordliest gold of daffodils aglow.  
I will not love thee, save with sighing breath  
On pale, worn cheeks thou waft reprieve of death  
    Come in a wash of fragrance let sick eyes  
    See leaves bud, bird-song hear through  
    windowed paradise."

In *Autumn*<sup>1</sup> there is a mournful beauty and a haunting cadence, echoing the sense of all that is lost. The poet draws a series of fine word-pictures

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of Love and Death*, p. 155.



as nine months appear, each with suitable associations. Thus March comes with her sunny crocuses; daffodils laugh round April; pink and white May blossoms surround May; with June come moonlight and roses; golden cornfields accompany July; August brings her tribute of glowing poppies; September is swathed in mournful mists; October heralds storms, rains and bare trees; and at last comes November with heaps of dead leaves and winter sleep. The first few stanzas draw a realistic picture of Autumn, and are full of subtle beauty—

“ By thy wave I linger,  
 Silent stream !  
 Autumn's golden finger  
 Paints thy dream.

From the beeches falling  
 Down thy face,  
 Summer, past recalling,  
 Drifts apace.

Only mists rise stilly;  
 A sad peace !  
 Dank earth yields no lily ;  
 Roses cease.

Here, where I sank lazy  
 Deep in grass,  
 No surviving daisy  
 Tells what was,—



Kingcup blaze of meadow,  
Cuckoo-call.  
Is it all a shadow  
I recall ? "

We shall end our treatment of Manmohan Ghose's poetry with a quotation of a poem entitled *London*. It is a revolt from the glorification of country life and gives the rush and rapture of town life, the joy of human sympathy and charm of human faces. It seems to us one of the most perfect and most original of Ghose's poems :—

" Farewell, sweetest country ; out of my heart, you roses,  
Wayside roses, nodding, the slow traveller to keep.  
Too long have I drowsed alone in the meadows deep,  
Too long alone endured the silence nature espouses.  
Oh, the rush, the rapture of life ! throngs, lights, houses,  
This is London. I wake as a sentinel from sleep.

Stunned with the fresh thunder, the harsh delightful  
noises,  
I move entranced on the thronging pavement.

How sweet,  
To eyes sated with green, the dusty brick-walled street !  
And the lone spirit, of self so weary, how it rejoices  
To be lost in others, bathed in the tones of human voices,  
And feel hurried along the happy tread of feet.

And a sense of vast sympathy my heart almost crazes,  
The warmth of kindred hearts in thousands beating  
with mine.

Each fresh face, each figure, my spirit drinks like wine,—  
Thousands endlessly passing. Violets, daisies,  
What is your charm to the passionate charm of faces,  
This ravishing reality, this earthliness divine ?



O murmur of men more sweet than all the wood's  
caresses,

How sweet only to be an unknown leaf that sings  
In the forest of life ! Cease, Nature, thy whisperings.

Can I talk with leaves, or fall in love with breezes?  
Beautiful boughs, your shade not a human pang appeases.  
This is London. I lie, and twine in the roots of things."<sup>1</sup>

### *Aravindo Ghose.*

Aravindo Ghose is a younger brother of Manmohan Ghose, but he is famous all over India as a scholar, poet, patriot and philosopher. Already his name figures in histories of India<sup>2</sup> and even outside India there are those who regard him as one of the profoundest thinkers of the country.<sup>3</sup>

Aravindo's childhood and youth, like that of his two brothers, was spent in England. At St. Paul's School, although a boy, he was remarkable for his knowledge of the Classics. From St. Paul's he went up to Cambridge to read for the Indian Civil Service Examination. In 1890, he took the examination and stood high in order of merit. At the departmental examination, however, he failed in riding and was disqualified from service. Shortly afterwards, he entered King's College,

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of Love and Death*, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent Smith, *Oxford History of India*.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Richard, *The Dawn over Asia*.



Cambridge, as a scholarship-holder. From King's College he graduated, in 1892, with a first class in the classical tripos. Having no money to live upon he was forced to enter upon a career immediately. The young Maharaja of Baroda, who was in England at the time, offered him service as his personal assistant, and Aravindo accepted the post. For twelve years after this, he worked in Baroda in several capacities. He was professor at the Baroda College, the Gaekwar's Private Secretary, and finally Vice-Principal of the College. At Baroda, he was much beloved by his students and held in high estimation by the Gaekwar. His life in Baroda was spent in contemplation and study. We have already referred to his great scholarship in the European classics, but he knew little or nothing of the civilization of his own country. His first care was to engage pundits and study Sanskrit. He soon became a great scholar in both Sanskrit and Bengali.

Meanwhile, events of great importance not only to the history of the country, but events which were to affect the life of Aravindo deeply, were taking place. Under the able leadership of Tilak, Surendranath Banerjea, and Dadabhai Naoroji a spirit of co-operation was spread through the country. Resolutions demanding self-determination for India were moved in the Congress. Just at this moment Lord Curzon passed the Partition of Bengal Act in spite of violent opposition and



popular feeling against it. Public opinion, thus flouted, turned against the Government. A wave of nationalism, starting in Bengal, spread throughout the country. Aravindo was caught on this wave. He resigned his service in Baroda and came to Calcutta. A National Council of Education was formed and Aravindo was made Principal of the National College. He soon found that he was up against a Conservatism he could not fight. The Council were unwilling to adopt the bold and radical methods advocated by Aravindo. The latter, therefore, resigned and joined the staff of *The Bande-Mataram*.<sup>1</sup> Through his writings he guided and stabilised the volume of national feeling. His writings were full of philosophic reflections and high idealism, but they were not wanting in practical suggestions. Yet the poet, the mystic, and religious teacher shone out in them. "Nationalism is a religion that comes from God. Nationalism cannot die, because it is God who is working in Bengal. God cannot be killed, God cannot be sent to gaol. Have you got real faith or is it merely political inspiration—a larger kind of selfishness."<sup>2</sup> And again, "Repression is nothing but the hammer of God that is beating us into shape, so that we may be moulded into a mighty nation, and become an instrument of his

<sup>1</sup> An Indian newspaper in English.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Aravindo Ghose* by Ramchandra Palit, p. 139.



work in the world. We are the iron and the anvil and his blows are showering upon us not to destroy but to recreate." <sup>1</sup>

Aravindo's advocacy of the cause of nationalism and his fearlessness in exposing the high-handed measures of the Indian Government brought him into disfavour with the latter. On the 3rd May, 1908, a posse of armed policemen surrounded his house and arrested him on a charge of being implicated in a conspiracy to provide dynamite for revolutionary purposes. For a year Aravindo was in prison, and then was brought up for trial. A strange and dramatic incident attended his trial. On the judge's bench sat a young Englishman of the name of Beachcroft, who had been a fellow student of Aravindo, and who had stood second in the examination in Greek, in which Aravindo had stood first. Before him, chained and handcuffed, awaiting his trial on a charge of treason, stood Aravindo. The young Chittaranjan Das, who, fifteen years afterwards, was to take Aravindo's place as the leader of Bengal, was the counsel for the defence. The charge was proved false and Aravindo was released. But he plunged fearlessly into work again. In March 1916 a warrant was issued against him, for his writings in *Karma Yogin*, an English weekly he had started. Aravindo got notice of it and fled to the French territory of Pondicherry.

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Aravindo Ghose* by Ramchandra Palit, p. 124.



From this date starts a new era in his life. Aravindo now renounced the world and practical life. He became a Yogi or Indian ascetic. For five years he plunged into the silence of Yoga. After that, in the monthly publication of the *Arya*, and in other books, he expounded a new system of philosophy which he had evolved in the silence of his Yoga. He also wrote masterly comments on the philosophical writings of India. The Frenchman, Paul Richard, lecturing to the Japanese students, holds Aravindo up as one of the great men of Asia. "The hour is coming of great things, of great events, and also of great men, the divine men of Asia. All my life I have sought for them across the world, for all my life I have felt they must exist somewhere in the world, that this world would die if they did not live. For they are its light, its heat, its life. It is in Asia that I have found the greatest amongst them—the leader, the hero of to-morrow. He is a Hindu. He is named Aravindo Ghose."<sup>1</sup>

Aravindo's poetical works are few. They are all early writings written either in England or in Baroda. *Songs to Myrtilla* contains poems written mostly between the eighteenth and twentieth years of the author's life. *Love and Death*, though first published in the '*Shāmaā*' of 1921 and republished in book form in the same year, was written in 1899. *Baji Prabhou* was first published in the

<sup>1</sup> *The Dawn over Asia* by Paul Richard—Essay on Aravindo Ghose



*Karma-Yogin* of 1909 but must have been written earlier. These three little volumes form all the original poetical works of Aravindo Ghose. *Songs of the Sea*, written in Bengali by C. R. Das, was translated into English verse by Aravindo. In the translation Aravindo shows considerable skill in clarifying and beautifying the original, in seizing the dim ill-expressed ideas of Das and turning them into the pure gold of poetry. A comparison of Das's own prose translation and Aravindo's verse translation will amply prove this. Besides this he translated Kalidasa's drama, *Vikram-Urvashi*, into English blank verse. As we know, nothing is more difficult than to translate a drama, written centuries ago, into a tongue which has no associations with the original. But Aravindo has done his work well on the whole. He has even been able to convey, to some extent, Kalidasa's delicious humour. Thus we have Manavaka saying :—

“ Why, what is there in heaven to pine for? There  
You do not eat, you do not drink, only  
Stare like so many fishes in a room  
With wide unblinking eyes.” <sup>1</sup>

Again Pururava's speech when Urvashi tells him that she can now enjoy his company, since his wife has given her leave, is full of reproachful tenderness :—

“ Oh love, if thou my body dost embrace,  
As seizable—a largess—from my queen—

<sup>1</sup> *Vikram-Urvashi* or *Hero and the Nymph*.



But whose permission didst thou ask, when thou  
Stolest my heart away." <sup>1</sup>

The *Songs to Myrtilla* was originally published in 1895 for private circulation, and contained lyrics of much charm and delicacy. Some of the lyrics show strong Greek influence. There is also a delicate, sensuous imagery and an earth-contact which is reminiscent of Keats. His descriptions of Nature are full of natural magic :—

" Sweet is the night, sweet and cool,  
As to parched lips a running pool ;  
Sweet when the flowers have fallen asleep  
And only moonlit rivulets creep,  
Like glow-worms in the dim and whispering wood,  
To commune with the quiet heart and solitude." <sup>2</sup>

Again in some poems we get all the freshness, the lyric rapture of the Elizabethan song-writers as in '*Night by the Sea*' :—

" Love, a moment drop thy hands ;  
Night within my soul expands.  
Veil thy beauties, milk-rose fair,  
In that dark and showering hair.  
Coral kisses ravish not  
When the soul is tinged with thought ;  
Burning looks are then forbid,  
Let each shyly-parted lid  
Hover like a settling dove  
O'er those deep-blue wells of love." <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Vikram-Urvashi*, Act III, Scene II.

<sup>2</sup> *Songs to Myrtilla*, p. 1.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.



The poems on Parnell and 'Ireland in 1896' are full of thought and fire, and sound an entirely different note. Aravindo, an ardent admirer of Parnell, was shocked at Ireland's ingratitude for his services, and is full of contempt for the weak men, who were at the head of Irish affairs after his death. Deep political thought is voiced in these lines :—

" For 'tis not foreign force, nor weight of wars,  
Nor treason, nor surprise, nor opposite stars,  
Not all these have enslaved nor can whate'er  
Vulgar opinion bruit, nor years impair,  
Ruin discourage, nor disease abate,  
A nation. Men are fathers of their fate;  
They dig the prison, they the crown command." <sup>1</sup>

The two poems which end the book, one on Bankimchandra Chatterjee, the other on Michael Madhusudan Dutt, are noble both in form and sentiment. We shall quote a few lines from the former to show their beauty—

" His nature kingly was, and as a god  
In large serenity and light he trod  
His daily way, yet beauty like soft flowers  
Wreathing a hero's sword, ruled all his hours,  
Thus moving in these iron times and drear,  
Barren of bliss and robbed of golden cheer,  
He sowed the desert with ruddy-hearted rose,  
The sweetest voice that ever spoke in prose." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Songs to Myrtilla*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.



“ *Baji Prabhou* ” records one of the memorable battles in Mahratta history, between Shivaji and the Moslems. Baji Prabhou, the hero of the poem, is still held by every Mahratta as the supreme example of heroism. The poem describes the battle at which the great warrior fell and which may be compared in many ways to the battle of Thermopylae. Shivaji, put to flight by his enemies, was retiring to his mountain fortress of Raigurh, but his enemies were close upon him. He therefore summoned Baji Prabhou and asked him to guard the pass while he went back and brought re-inforcements. Baji, with only fifty men, guarded the pass and repelled all attacks. The poem is an account of the fierce, deadly fray against tremendous odds, in which the courage and nobility of the Prabhou shines out. At last, just as all the ammunition is exhausted, Baji is mortally wounded, and the Muslims are on the point of rushing the pass, Shivaji appears and gains the victory. The poem opens with a short, terse description of the fierce noon through which the Mahratta army was fleeing :—

“ A noon of Deccan with its tyrant glare  
Oppressed the earth; the hills stood deep in haze.  
And sweltering athirst the fields glared up  
Longing for water in the courses parched  
Of streams long dead.—Nature and man alike  
Imprisoned by a bronze and brilliant sky,  
Sought an escape from the wide trance of heat.” <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Baji Prabhou*, p. 1.



Baji's retort to Tanaji Malsure shows the deep vein of religion which animated the old warrior. It is of interest because it reflects too the author's own opinion on the subject; for we see the same opinion repeated in his political writings—

“ Tanaji Malsure, not in this living net  
Of flesh and nerve, nor in the flickering mind  
Is a man's manhood seated. God within  
Rules us, who in the Brahmin and the dog  
Can, if he will, show equal godhead; not  
By men is mightiness achieved; Baji  
Or Malsure, is but a name, a robe  
And covers One alone. We but employ  
Bhavani's strength, who in an arm of flesh  
Is mighty as the thunder and the storm.”<sup>1</sup>

The poem is well constructed and written in fine blank verse. It is a great contrast to the tame imitations of Scott which had been the vogue amongst the minor poets, when dealing with a subject of the same kind. It can well serve as an example to others having for their subject a theme in Mahratta history.

*Love and Death* is a story of the love of Ruru, son of the Sage Bhrigu, and Priyamvada, daughter of the Apsara Menaka and the king of the Gandharvas. In the very height of their happiness Priyamvada is bitten by a snake and dies. Ruru is inconsolable and his grief troubles the gods. The God of Love comes down and tells

<sup>1</sup> *Baji Prabhou*, p. 8.



him that he can save Priyamvada from Yama, the God of Death, if he sacrifices half his life. Ruru consents and his love is restored to him. The theme is made the subject of much fine poetry and the blank verse is very good. The poem is full of sensuous imagery. At times it is too sensuous. The descriptions are vivid and full of imagination. The following description of Ruru's voyage to the nether world will serve as an example :

“ The world  
Was water and the skies to water plunged.  
All night with a dim motion gliding down,  
He felt the dark against his eyelids; felt,  
As in a dream more real than daylight,  
The helmsman with his dumb and marble face  
Near him, and moving wideness all around,  
And that continual gliding dimly on,  
As one who on a shoreless water sails  
For ever to a port he shall not win.”<sup>1</sup>

The terror, the gloom, the horribleness, the awful sorrow of the various regions of Hell visited by Ruru, are described with a vividness, a power and grandeur that is reminiscent of Milton's Hell and Dante's Inferno, but it is no mere echo. Here is a description of one of those regions :

“ He stood upon an inner bank, with strange  
Black dreary mosses covered, and perceived  
A dim and level plain without a flower.  
Over it paced a multitude immense

<sup>1</sup> *Love and Death*, p. 20.



With gentle faces occupied by pain;  
Strong men were there and grieving mothers, girls  
With early beauty in their limbs, and young  
Sad children of their childlike faces robbed.  
Naked they paced with falling hair and gaze  
Drooping upon their bosoms; weak as flowers,  
That die for want of rain un murmuring." <sup>1</sup>

In the narration, too, the style of Milton is frequently recalled. He uses beautiful Indian names to swell the grandeur of the verse, as Milton made use of Classical and Biblical names. At times, too, we get a sublimity and depth of thought, which reveal the philosophic bent of the poet's mind. We shall quote the magnificent speech of Yama about old age :

"Not as tedious evil, nor to be  
Lightly rejected gave the gods old age,  
But tranquil, but august, but making easy  
The steep ascent to God. Therefore must Time  
Still batter down the glory and form of youth  
And animal magnificent strong ease,  
To warn the earthward man that he is spirit  
Dallying with transience, nor by death he ends,  
Nor to the Dumb warm mother's arms is bound,  
But called unborn into the unborn skies.  
For body fades with the increasing soul  
And wideness of its limit grown intolerant  
Replaces life's impetuous joys by peace.  
Youth, manhood, ripeness, age, four seasons  
'Twixt its return and pale departing life

<sup>1</sup> *Love and Death*, p. 24.



Wonderful age with those approaching skies.'"<sup>1</sup>

We have said enough to show the beauty, the power, the imaginative force which lie hidden even in the three slender volumes of early verse to which we have access. (Had Aravindo devoted himself to the Muses, it is our opinion, he would have been a great poet. What India has gained in a patriot and philosopher, she has lost in a poet. We feel sure, had circumstances moulded his life otherwise, Aravindo with his deep scholarship and the culture of both East and West, would have been a most eloquent and powerful interpreter of Indian thought and feeling in English poetry.)

Strictly speaking, Ravindranath Tagore has no place in our study for his English books are in prose. Yet that prose has such qualities of rhythm (often bordering on poetry) and of

<sup>1</sup> *Love and Death*, p. 28.



imagination, that it has the effect of poetry. He has also written (though not published) a few lyrics in orthodox verse.

We shall not delay over Tagore's life. It has been exhaustively treated in Mr. E. J. Thompson's two volumes on Ravindranath, as well as in the poet's own *Reminiscences*. Nor shall we give any account of Tagore's Bengali works for that will scarcely be to the point. We shall, therefore, after a glance at the main influences of his life, confine ourselves to Tagore the lyric poet as revealed to us in his half a dozen volumes of English translations<sup>1</sup> and the few English verses to which we have access.

Ravindranath Tagore was born on the 6th of May, 1861. He was a quiet, sensitive child living in a dream world of his own. He was educated chiefly at home. His boyhood was spent at a time of intense literary and intellectual excitement in Bengal. The novels of Bankimchandra Chatterjee, the first great Bengali novelist, were appearing in serial form in magazines. Madhusudan Dutt had started a new era in Bengali poetry and drama. An appreciation of the older Bengali poets was also coming into vogue.<sup>2</sup>

The literary renaissance had its centre in the Tagore household and later reached its culmination

<sup>1</sup> *Gitanjali*, *Fruit Gathering*, *The Gardener*, *Lover's Gift* and *Crossing*, *Stray Birds*, *The Fugitive* and *The Crescent Moon*.

<sup>2</sup> *Reminiscences*, pp. 116 and 136.



in the person of the poet himself. His eldest cousin Ganendra not only translated the Sanskrit drama *Vikram-Urvashi* but wrote many hymns, patriotic songs and poems.<sup>1</sup> His elder brother startled and delighted the household by his poetical composition entitled *The Dream Journey*.<sup>2</sup> His fourth brother composed melody after melody<sup>3</sup> and plays were staged in the house.<sup>4</sup> Thus we see that music, poetry and drama were in the air he breathed. It is little wonder that Ravindranath's genius was awakened early. He appeared in print before he was fifteen and continued to contribute regularly to the *Bharati*, a magazine started by his brother Jyotirindra. The poet's visit to England afforded him little pleasure.

The nineties were spent at Shelaida on the Ganges. These were busy years spent in looking after the paternal property. It was a very happy period in the poet's life. The river was a source of deep joy and inspiration to him and fills his work with beautiful images.

In 1900 he founded his famous school at Bolepur. In it he has tried to embody his educational ideals. As an educational experiment and as an attempt to continue the ancient forest schools in modern days, Ravindranath's venture

<sup>1</sup> *Reminiscences*, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 196.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 119.



is interesting. Santiniketana has an added interest to the student of literature because the school and latterly the Visvabharati (World University) which has been started at Bolepur are amongst the most cherished of the poet's creation, and because it is at Bolepur that the poet has written most of his later works. Early in this Bolepur experiment we have his rather meteoric appearance in politics. The noble idealism with which he was animated made a deep impression and helped to raise Indian nationalism to higher levels than those of mere politics.

In 1912 Tagore went to England. Soon after, the translations of the *Gitanjali* songs appeared with a preface by W. B. Yeats. These made a deep impression on men like Bradley and Stopford Brooke. The gaining of the Nobel Prize gave him world fame.

The period of his life from 1919 is entitled by Mr. E. J. Thompson, the period of internationalism. It was not only the time of his international fame, but a period which is associated with his efforts to establish the Visvabharati or World University at Bolepur. On the 23rd December, 1917, the University was opened by Brajendra Nath Seal. Its aim was to establish an international centre of learning where scholars from the West could meet, not only Indian but Asiatic scholars of all countries on terms of equality, good feeling and mutual understanding. This



glorious scheme is only kept from collapse by Rabindranath's efforts on its behalf. No matter whether it will exist to fulfil its aim or not, the conception of Visvabharati will remain amongst the noblest of the poet's dreams.

We have access to only a few of Tagore's original English verses, but two of them show real beauty. These poems are only desultory experiments in unrhymed verse, yet we are led to think that had Tagore taken to it seriously and made it the medium of his translations his readers would have experienced more of the beautiful melody of Tagore's Bengali verses. For example, there is both beauty of rhythm and movement in the following :—

“ When the evening steals on Western Waters,  
Thrills the air with wings of homeless shadows,  
When the sky is crowned with star-gemmed silence  
And the dreams dance on the deep of slumber,  
When the lilies lose their faith in morning  
And in panic close their hopeless petals,  
There's a bird which leaves its nest in secret,  
Seeks its song in trackless paths of heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

Again in *April* there is a freshness and dancing cadence very suitable to the subject :—

“ Breezy April, vagrant April,  
Rock me in your swing of music ;  
Thrill my branches with enchantment  
At your touch of sweet surprises ;

<sup>1</sup> See E. J. Thompson's *Rabindranath Tagore* (Oxford University Press).



In my life-dream by the wayside  
 You come startling me from slumber,  
 Wilful in your mood fantastic  
 Courting, teasing, and inconstant."

" Breezy April, vagrant April,  
 Living with my lonesome shadows,  
 I know all your fitful fancies  
 Leafy language, flitting footsteps.  
 All my boughs break into blossom,  
 At your passing breath and whisper,  
 All my leaves break into tumult,  
 Of surrender at your kisses." <sup>1</sup>

Again Tagore's prose translations are full of rhythmic beauty. In the following piece the rhythm has almost a metrical movement :—

" Have you heard his silent steps?  
 He comes, comes, ever comes.  
 In the fragrant days of sunny April, through the forest  
 paths, he comes, comes, ever comes.  
 In the rainy gloom of July nights, on the thundering  
 chariot of clouds, he comes, comes, ever comes.  
 In sorrow after sorrow, it is his steps that press upon  
 my heart, and it is the golden touch of his feet  
 that makes my joy to shine." <sup>2</sup>

The simplicity and sublimity of the following lines are the very essence of great poetry, and the rhythmical movement is noble :—

" Thou didst not turn in contempt from my childish  
 play among the dust, and the steps that I heard in my  
 play room are the same that are echoing from star to  
 star." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. J. Thompson's *Rabindranath Tagore*.

<sup>2</sup> *Gitanjali*, No. 45.



In his translations Tagore gives us, too, images full of the most beautiful poetry :

“ There comes the dawn with a golden basket in her right hand bearing the wreath of beauty silently to crown the earth.

And there comes evening over the lonely meadows deserted by herds through trackless paths carrying cool draughts of peace in her golden pitcher from the Western ocean of rest.” <sup>2</sup>

The fact that the greatest leader of the renaissance in Indian poetry uses the English language with such a poetic touch has a deep significance. It shows the debt this renaissance owes to English literature.

Thus it is that though Tagore has not a prominent place in this study, his masterly and poetical use of the English language makes it impossible for us to exclude him.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gitanjali*, No. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Gitanjali*, No. 67.



## CONCLUSION

We have given a survey of Indian writers of English verse. Though for reasons stated in our introduction our survey has not been exhaustive, it has been quite representative. In our introductory chapter we have considered the reasons why Indians first began writing English verse. We found that it followed on the tremendous ferment caused by the introduction of new ideas from the West and the enthusiastic study of English literature. It was also helped by a period of deadness in vernacular literature, just at the time when the new ideas were flowing in, as well as by the wave of Anglicism which seemed to have been passing over the country, anglicising the habits and thoughts of the educated community so that it was deemed greater honour to write in English than in the vernacular. Again the great difference between the ideals of the two literatures made it necessary for men of genius to arise, before the new ideas could be adapted in a suitable way to vernacular poetry. Men of literary tastes who had little genius, therefore, wrote imitative, conventional poetry. Such are the early writers of English verse. Kashiprosad Ghose's poetry is an imitation of the poetry of de Rozio (a popular Anglo-Indian poet of the time), of eighteenth century poets like Gray, and of conventional Bengali poetry of the eighteenth century.



The Dutts tried to imitate Scott, Byron and Wordsworth. Malabari and Ram Sharma attempted the familiar and epigrammatic styles but descended to mere colloquialisms which can be called poetry only by courtesy. Ram Krishna Pillai, taking Tennyson as his model, merely reproduced the smooth conventionalities of Victorian verse.

The minor writers continue the traditions of these early writers, and their work ranges from ungrammatical doggerel to correct and polished verses.

English, after the days of Macaulay, formed the main subject of the curriculum of Indian Universities. English was not only the language of the ruling class but a language understood by half the world. Every ambitious versifier, therefore, hoping to acquire world fame, wrote in English. Professors of English literature like Mr. Sheshadri and Mr. Thadani mistook their fervour for poetry and their command over English versification for inspiration, and wrote mediocre verses.

There are, however, a few writers of English verse who have used the English language as a poetical instrument to excellent purpose. The first of these was Toru Dutt. Coming to England at the age of fifteen and educated almost entirely on the English and French literary classics, she showed distinct genius in her English



verse. But as she died at the age of twenty-one, there was no time for her genius to ripen. Still, in spite of her immaturity, she has written verses of undoubted literary merit.

Sarojini Naidu, like Toru Dutt, came to England when only sixteen, and spent her most susceptible years in England amidst literary surroundings. She shows distinct talent in her handling of English verse but her poetry is superficial and does not strike the depths of Indian life and thought. Her brother, though more truly Indian in his treatment of Indian subjects, is still very young and scarcely has his sister's talent.

The two Ghose brothers show undoubted genius, but uncongenial surroundings in later life hampered them. Both came to England in childhood, and spent their youth and early manhood in this country. Both were profound classical scholars. Manmohan Ghose wrote some of his most exquisite poems while still in England. His return to India saw him struggling against uncongenial surroundings and a tragic life, and though he continued writing poetry the mark of his isolation is left on his later work.

Aravindo Ghose, soon after his return, was caught in the whirl of Indian politics, and forsook the English muse, devoting his later life to the cause of Indian culture and philosophy.

Rabindranath Tagore's case is slightly different from that of these writers. Not only does he not



write English verse but his writings are almost wholly translations from his Bengali poems. His translations have evoked the admiration of the West and show great literary merit.

If then we take the whole output of English poetry written by Indians, we find it has added very little to English literature. Most of it consists of literary exercises in English verse. Only a few writers can take their place amongst the poets of England, and when the history of English literature is written, there will be, we feel sure, a chapter devoted to these writers, who, though they have worked under unfavourable conditions, were genuinely inspired. The fact, however, remains that English verse written in India can scarcely flourish, for the surroundings are uncongenial and the writers work in isolation. We have seen Manmohan Ghose complaining bitterly that "there was no true understanding of things," and we have seen his insatiable longing to return to England. Separated from the main current of English poetry, from contemporary influences, from the criticism and appreciation of kindred spirits, a poet's work is bound to suffer. Matthew Arnold attributes the scarcity of Gray's work to the want of congenial surroundings. Want of sympathy and understanding, even when they cannot kill genius, can considerably hamper it, and the writers of English verse in India meet with both. Our study, therefore, leads us to think that no great good can



be achieved by Indians writing English verse. It may even lead to suppression of true genius, for we have seen how Madhusudan Dutt, from a mediocre writer of English verse, became a great Bengali poet when he took to writing in his native tongue. Besides, a study of vernacular literatures shows that they are capable of yielding a rich harvest of poetry when properly cultivated. As long as the vernaculars of India are thus alive it should be the aim of Indians to develop them, for writing in a foreign tongue under uncongenial circumstances can serve no useful purpose.

The main interest of our study, however, does not lie in the fact that a great many Indians have written correct English verse and some have written really good English verse. Its interest lies rather in the fact that the writing of English verse was the first and most direct response to the tremendous influence of English literature on Indian thought and culture.

This influence can very well compare with, and bears resemblance to, other historic occasions when one nation has been influenced by the literature of another. For example, when Rome, the mistress of the world, lay captive at the feet of Greece, just as Greek literature, Greek thought and Greek education formed the basis on which later Republican and Imperial Rome was built, so in India education and English literature are the basis on which a new India is being built. And



this achievement of England is in a sense greater than that of Greece, for India had a civilization far older and greater than Rome or Europe could boast of when Greece triumphed over them.

Again the change which has come over India resembles, in some ways, the change which came over Anglo-Saxon England after the Norman conquest. We know how at first Norman-French totally replaced Anglo-Saxon as the language of courts and schools and of the ruling class. But depressed Anglo-Saxon was suffering a sea-change, and when at last it emerged as English, it had broken the bounds of an insular dialect and had become one of the important languages of Europe. Literature suffered a change as great as the language. It drew nourishment from a rich store of themes and literary forms which came from France and Italy, and both literature and language attained their perfection in the works of Chaucer. In India, the influence of English literature is greatly changing the languages of the country, which are shedding their cumbrous forms and are acquiring greater expressiveness, whilst the literatures are gaining richness and variety from the inflow of new ideas, and Bengal at least has known her Chaucer in the person of Rabindranath Tagore.

The revival of Greek literature and thought which ended the Middle Ages and introduced a new era in European thought and literature has



its counterpart in India to-day. Just as in mediæval Europe debased religion and a degenerate clergy had dominated the life of the people of Europe and cramped their intellects, so in India a religion which had forgotten much of its noble ideals and a priesthood that had become ignorant and self-seeking, cramped the minds and dominated the intellect of India's millions. This was reflected, as in the case of mediæval Europe, in the poverty and the narrow range of literature. A sudden liberation came with the study of English by Indians. The spirit of Greece with its search for the Beautiful, its liberty of thought and boldness of enquiry, came through English literature and shook the Indian mind to its very depth. This gave literature a sudden impetus. The richness of English literature supplied new methods and forms of expressions which were naturalised into the Indian literatures widening their scope.

Such comparisons could be extended, but enough has been said to show that though India is still in the process of a great change it is not too early to say that a new era in India has opened which has drawn its life-blood from the inspiration which came through English literature. The Mohammedan conquest affected India only politically, but could not touch her soul. That is why when all reason for political bitterness between Hindus and Mohammedans has disappeared the jar still



exists. The clash between Hindus and Mohammedans is *not* only a question of the Hindus beating tom-toms in front of mosques or of Mohammedans slaughtering cows. It goes far deeper. It is the clash of two cultures which have never been able to harmonize or coalesce. Hindus owe no spiritual allegiance to their Mohammedan conquerors and the latter look beyond India to Persia and Arabia for their cultural home. The case of the British connection with India is different. Even within the short space of a century, English literature and thought have made a radical change in Indian thought and literature. We see some definite forms of this influence. There are (1) the writers whose works are purely imitative ; (2) those writers who like Toru Dutt, Sarojni Naidu and Aravindo Ghose have tried to sing of Indian themes in English verse ; (3) those who like Manmohan Ghose looked purely to the West for inspiration ; and (4) those who turned definitely to writing in their own language animated by English literary ideals, in whose writing, therefore, we get a mingling of English and Indian. This last then is the most permanent contribution which English literature made on Indian culture. In our first chapter, taking the case of Bengal, we showed how the young reformers carried the light of this new culture through the length and breadth of the country, commencing a new era in Bengali literature and scattering the old traditions



to the winds. There was, however, a more direct influence of English literature, and it is this which we treat of in our study. The same reason which led to a great deal of poetical exercises in Latin, in Europe, led to the writing of English verses by Indians. And this reason is that English forms the main subject in the curriculum in the schools and universities just as the classics formed the main subject of the curriculum in the schools and universities of Europe. There is another point of similarity between these Latin verses and the greater part of the English verses written by Indians, and, that is that both are imitative and conventional, and more in the nature of poetical exercises. Even if we take the case of Milton, his Latin verses can in no way compare to his English verses. And the reasons which made Milton's Latin verses unsuccessful are the same which make the verses of Indians writing in India unsuccessful. Milton no doubt spoke Latin fluently just as the majority of these writers spoke and still speak English. But Latin was not the language of his thoughts and dreams and the greatest poetry can only be composed in a language in which a man thinks and dreams. The great majority of Indians do not think or dream in English. English is not alive in India and that is why the few writers who were genuinely gifted were hampered in writing English poetry. That is why Anglo-Indian verse is of such poor quality.



The interest of these verses therefore lies in the fact that they are the direct offspring of the Cultural Conquest of England over India. Nations may rise and fall. The Military Conquest over India may become forgotten history. But as long as the Indian languages and literature endure they will bear in them the mark of this Cultural Conquest. Even to-day when the bitterness between England and India is so marked, is it not a great thing that the poetry and culture of England have moved Indians in the way they have? When this political bitterness is forgotten, the love and allegiance which Indians owe to English culture will remain. They will look upon England with something of the same love with which England looks upon Greece, and who knows but that in ages to come an Indian Byron may forsake his native land and kindred, to die in the cause of England in gratitude for the spiritual heritage she has left India! Yet it is the military conquest of India which is the pride of Englishmen, and it is only one here and there endowed with a truer vision who sees this other and more far-reaching conquest and takes pride in it. The average Englishman boasts about British strength and British justice not realising that the former has often failed and the latter is fallible, and ignoring the fact that what has mattered most in India is British imagination and British intellect. When the time comes for reckoning spiritual and not



material values (for the former only is of all time) it will be the pride of Englishmen that there has existed a soul like Manmohan Ghose who, unmoved by the material splendour of England, has been stirred to the very depth of his being by the Thought and Literature of England, and to whom England has been the land of his cultural adoption.

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